

19세미만 구독불가



*Bucia* 1  
하늘가리기

루 시 아

Joara

# 루시아 4

하늘가리기  
정판소설

# Lucia

– 루시아 –

- Book 4 -

-Author-

Covering The Sky

하늘가리기

[ RubyMaybe ]

# 【TRUTH & FALSEHOOD】

# Chapter 46

## Part 1

“You may enter, young master.”

Jerome led Damian till they reached the front of the office. Damian took a deep breath in front of the large door then pushed the heavy door aside and walked in. Before leaving for boarding school, he'd only been inside this room once.

The Duke had called the boy to tell him he was going to boarding school.

[I have done my part and declared you as my successor. The rest is up to you. Graduate. Then this place is yours]

From that day on, it became Damian's life goal to inherit the title of the Duke, someday. He'd never thought of the reason or what he would do after he became the Duke. The goal was just the boy's meaning for existence. It was his worth for living.

Now, Damian had found a true goal. Becoming the Duke was simply a means towards that goal.

Power.

He wanted to have power. Only with power could one protect whom they want to protect. Just as his father was able to protect his mother because he had the power, Damian wanted to have it too.

Damian admired his father. His father was a great knight and the strongest man in the world. However, he had no confidence of becoming like his father so he had to find a possible way for himself to become stronger. The greatest power the boy could obtain from his efforts alone were the abilities/knowledge he could gain at the academy.

The air inside the office was a little breezy. The unique shallow fragrance of wood drifted off the furniture and documents were piled up on the spacious desk positioned diagonally to the entrance. In the quiet office, only the intermittent sound of pages

being turned could be heard.

Damian walked quietly and stopped a few steps away from the desk. Hugo lifted his head and saw Damian then lowered his head back to his document.

“Is this going to take a while?” (Hugo)

“No. I came to tell you I will be returning back to the academy.”

“I believe it will be difficult to keep up with this semester’s courses at this point.”

“Yes. But if I return now, I will be able to listen to the session for the semester break. I can replace the semester I missed with this session.”

“You can graduate even if you don’t complete one semester.”

“I want to have the best grades.”

“I told you, you only need to graduate.”

“I just want to do that.”

“Why?”

“I want to gain power by increasing my knowledge.”

Hugo lifted his head.

Damian was a little nervous receiving his father’s gaze. Hugo carefully studied Damian. The boy stood upright and his gaze was lowered to the floor but there was no sign of intimidation.

It was much better than his vassals that turn timid once he laid eyes on them. Hugo recalled the first day he saw Damian. The eyes of the child Philip brought were clear and pure. That was why he couldn’t help but believe Philip’s words saying that he was his brother’s son.

A child of the Taran blood would not have such eyes unless it was his brother’s child.

“Power, huh.”

Hugo chuckled and turned his gaze back to the document. He signed it with a pen and moved it to the side.

“Scholars do not rule the world. How do you know that the knowledge you’ll learn and nurture from the Academy will become your strength?”

Damian was taken aback by the unexpected problem presented to him.

“If you graduate, regardless of your grades, this place is yours. If it is as the Duke of Taran then that should be significant power.”

Whether the boy kept his grades and graduated or earned the best grades and graduated, the position of the Duke was the boy’s. Hence, no matter how much effort was put into it, the result was still the same.

Damian wanted to gain new strength, not one given to him by his father but one he gained with his own hands. As for the greatest strength that student Damian could gain from the academy with his efforts alone? There was only one thing that came to mind.

There was an organization called ‘Conference’ consisting only of students in ‘Ixium’, the academy which Damian attended. In Ixium, the power of Conference was remarkable. The Chairman of ‘Conference’ was called ‘Shita’. Damian was still quite young so he’d had no direct encounter with them and members of Conference were mostly senior students.

Every once in a while as he walked the school grounds, he got to witness students watching the road for these ‘conference’ members as though they were kings. Even when he saw that, at the time Damian did not have much interest.

Because then, the boy’s goal was simply just to graduate. However now, he was interested.

“I will become ‘Shita’”

## Part 2

Hugo looked up to face Damian, an intrigued look in his eye.

“‘Shita’ is the Academy’s...” (Damian)

“I know what it is.” (Hugo)

Hugo never attended the Academy but he held interest in it. It wasn’t just because he sent Damian there but because of its inclination. It wasn’t just the nobles of Xenon, nobles of other nations were increasingly sending their children to Ixium. Because of personal connections.

In about ten years, the completion of a course in Ixium would become an indispensable process for nobles. As a place where people lived it was somewhat similar to others. The Academy had its own powers and rankings. Even so, in a restricted environment like the Academy, one might wonder what the big deal is with a time-constrained power but in fact, the more enclosed an environment is, the more absolute the power.

As far as Hugo was concerned, it was better than being the king of an insignificant minor nation. The power of the Academy’s Shita was greatly strengthened by the war and as time passed, it became even stronger. By the time Damian graduates, it would become a force that could not be ignored.

The experience and status from becoming the Academy’s Shita would be able to overthrow the limitations of his birth status as an illegitimate child. The child may not have thought of such a distant future but Hugo was very intrigued by the conclusion the boy had reached.

When Hugo received reports on Damian’s life on the Academy, it detailed that the boy was studying very hard but apart from that, he showed no interest in anything else. So why did he suddenly want power? How much could he accomplish? Hugo wanted to see.

“It’s not a position one can get by just studying.”

“I understand.”

“Keep this in mind. Inadequate power is worse than non-existing power. If one wants to be the best, one has to be high enough that others wouldn’t even dare to look.”

“Yes.”

“Did you know of your mother entering you into the register?”

“Yes. Mo... ther told me.”

“Go tell her you’ll be returning to the Academy”

“Yes.”

“Anything else is fine with me but don’t go killing people at the Academy. That one’s a little troublesome to sort out. If you do end up doing so, contact me first before informing the Academy.”

His father was a scary person indeed. Damian once again realized this fact.

“...Yes.”

Damian bowed his head and left the office. A while after the boy left, Hugo chuckled lightly and muttered to himself.

“Your son is a dozen times smart than you.”

Whenever he recalled his brother, he always felt pain but strangely this time, he only felt good inside.

◊ ◊ ◊

It was afternoon tea time when Damian went to find Lucia. Lucia was on the way downstairs to have her tea when she encountered Damian. She greeted him with a smile and walked with him to the receiving room.

The two of them sat in the receiving room, drinking the tea that Jerome had skillfully prepared.

“Do you need me for something? What’s the matter?” (Lucia)

Around this time, Damian was usually studying in his room.

“I have something to tell you. I’ll be going back to the Academy.”

Lucia’s hand lifting the teacup to her lips froze and she didn’t say anything for a moment then she lowered the cup back to the table.

“Could it be you still have the garden party on your mind?”

“No, I have to go back now to keep up with my course.”

It wasn’t strange for children at Damian’s age to throw a tantrum that they didn’t want to go to school. Lucia felt somewhat sorry for the overly mature Damian. Her initial thought that it was cute had changed. After conversing with the child numerous times, she’d come to realize that the child’s thinking ability was like that of an adult’s. Damian was a genius.

Because his intellect was extremely high, the usual babyish childhood did not suit him. Lucia knew a child similar to Damian in her dream. It was Bruno, the third son of the husband in her dream, Count Matin. A tutor who had taught Bruno for only a short while called him a genius.

‘At that time, he was only one year older than Damian.’

Lucia met Bruno for the first time when he was 12 years old. Bruno did not resemble the Count Matin whether it was in intellect or appearance, making one doubt if he was really Count Matin’s son. His rebelliousness against his father was also quite huge so he caused both little and big troubles. One of these troubles was chasing out his tutors with clever and mischievous plans.

In the end, Count Matin drove Bruno out to study as a scholar. The Bruno who was cynical and rebellious in everything was very precocious. So Lucia knew a grown up genius child was like. Apart from the name of ‘genius’, Bruno and Damian were completely different. Damian was a much more, cute, loveable and kind child.

“Right. I should be glad you’re going back to study. When are you going to leave?”

“Preparations will be done quickly so I will be setting out tomorrow morning.”

“Tomorrow morning? So soon?”

Lucia did not expect to be suddenly separated from Damian. To her, Damian was her son and friend. Just like Damian was comforted by Lucia, Lucia was also comforted by him. Because of the appearance of the boy that looked just like Hugo, she was able to endure her longing and as her affections for the child grew, she realized her love for Hugo grew even more.

“Then...”

Will you be back next year? Lucia was about to ask that and stopped herself. Next year, the King would die and they would have to go to the capital. After which they would have to call Damian to the capital but if Damian wasn't even accepted in the North which was the Taran Duke's fief, one could not say how much he would be accepted in the capital.

Until Damian got older and could debut in the social circles, it would be better for him to stay in boarding school, that way he wasn't under the gazes of people like now.

‘Maybe things will change as time passes.’

She didn't think that Hugo appointed Damian to be his successor without putting any thought into it. He must have some thoughts of his own.

“Since you are setting out tomorrow, is there a lot to prepare?” (Lucia)

“I just have to pack my books.”

“Then, do you want to talk a bit more? Tell me about your life at the Academy.”

“Okay.”

Over the course of the afternoon, the mother-and-son pair stayed in the receiving room and talked about several things.

The next day, people were gathered around a carriage that looked set up for an early morning departure. A coachman sat ready to depart on the journey, a servant stood waiting and all the servants were out to send off their young master. Even Hugo was outside too.

After hearing the boy was leaving, Hugo sent his well wishes but Lucia nagged him saying ‘what kind of send-off is that’ and dragged him outside. In front of the open

door to the horse carriage, Damian and Lucia stood face to face to say their goodbyes.

“Take good care of your health. And study hard.” (Lucia)

“I will.”

“Take your meals regularly. Don’t get hurt. Ah... I’ve already mentioned health...”

It was quite the sight to see Lucia looking for the words to keep going. Damian’s heart grew warm and a smile naturally formed on his lips.

“Milady.”

A servant came up to them with a basket. Lucia received the basket and held it out to Damian. Asha was in the half-open basket. When its eyes met the boy’s, its ears perked up and it moved.

“It seems Asha already thinks of you as its master. You should take him.”

“You are raising him for the fox hunt, aren’t you?”

“It’s fine. I can just watch the hunt.”

“But... at the academy, pets are...”

“Don’t worry about that. Your father took care of it.”

Right? As though asking, Lucia turned her head to look at Hugo standing a few steps away and Hugo nodded his head. For Hugo, it was simply killing two birds with one stone. There was no better way to take care of the baby beast.

Changing something like the school’s regulation of no pets allowed was nothing much to Hugo. It was not widely known but he had contributed a considerable amount of money to Ixium when he placed Damian in the school and so he was entered onto the executive board.

And because Hugo had bought out many of the board members who could make decisions beforehand, he was able to change the school regulations as much as he liked. People may think of the Taran Duke as a power-seeking knight but in actuality, he was a pretty thorough person.

“I hope Asha will become a friend close to your heart in your life at the academy.”

“Yes. Thank you.”

A servant received the basket and placed into the carriage.

“I’ll be leaving now.”

“Ah... Right. You have to go. Damian, can I hug you as my last farewell?”

“...Yes.”

Lucia reached out and embraced Damian. Damian’s hands floated in the air for a bit then he relaxed and placed his hand on her back.

Damian was a tactful child so he knew quite well that the Ducal couple’s relationship was good. He had already thrown out his previous idea that the Duke only married out of necessity. He also knew that a child would be born someday from a good couple relationship.

If a child was born from the ducal couple’s relationship, Damian’s position would become like that of a sandcastle. A legally registered illegitimate child. There was no way Damian could stand up to a child truly born from the legal wife. But it didn’t matter. The position as the Duke, no matter what, was good.

If his younger brother was born and wanted to take his place, he would gladly give it to him. All Damian wanted to do was to protect. He wanted to protect the caring warmth that surrounded Roam and he would try his hardest to gain the power to protect his mother’s laughter. The two of them separated after the hug.

“Mother.”

Lucia’s eyes widened to circles and she looked at Damian, stunned. The boy suddenly took a huge stride forward and Lucia was slightly startled. Damian grabbed Lucia’s hand, leaned down and politely kissed the back of her hand.

“I don’t know when I’ll see you again so please remain with peace and comfort.”

Damian smiled as he looked at the frozen Lucia who was unable to give a reply. It was the first time she had ever seen a mischievous smile on the boy’s face.

# Chapter 47

## Part 1

Hugo's lips turned crooked watching this scene but after a moment, he chuckled.

'I'll let it slide.'

If someone else had done that, he would've broken all their limbs. Damian climbed onto the carriage and it began to set off and Lucia stood watching until the figure of the carriage could no longer be seen. Hugo came up to her and patted her shoulder.

"What are you doing?"

"...he called me 'mother'"

"If he doesn't call you mother, what would he call you?"

"B-But, that's the first time he's ever called me that..."

"This child honestly, he only calls me that once till he leaves.'

When Damian called her mother, Lucia's feelings were in conflict because she was sad over him leaving and touched feelings over being called mother.

She abruptly turned to face Hugo, revealing reddened eyes that were as though she would start crying at any moment.

"Did you see that?"

"See what?"

"He's your son indeed. Already being a ladies' man."

"..."

Lucia cast a wistful gaze in the direction that the carriage disappeared, mumbling

about how her son shouldn't grow up to be a bad man that made women cry and how she wouldn't raise him that way.

Hugo stealthily stepped away from her and darted to his office.

◊ ◊ ◊

'Damian is gone.'

When Lucia thought about it, it made her depressed.

'Mother.'

The memory of him calling her that rose to the forefront of her mind and she held her reddening face.

'But I can't hear it anymore now.'

With this thought, she became depressed again. After sending Damian off, Lucia spent all day in her thoughts, going back and forth between two opposite extremes of emotions.

"Milady, the bath water is ready."

The maid was already repeating it for the third time. For some time now, Lucia had changed into her night chemise to bathe and was sitting on the bed.

"Okay."

Lucia gave a reply but her head hung low as she continued to be absorbed in her thoughts. The maid was cautious to not keep urging her madam so she kept standing there, unable to do anything.

Suddenly, a strong force caught Lucia's chin and lifted it up, causing her head to lift. As some point, Hugo had entered and was lifting up her chin to look at her.

His slightly chilled red eyes swept over her face. As soon as Hugo walked into the bedroom and saw her on the bed with her head lowered, he was shocked. The thought that perhaps she was leaning over to cry made him uncomfortable so immediately lifted her head to check.

When he saw that her expression was good, the rock on his chest was lifted.

‘Why’s he here already?’

Lucia glanced around looking for the maid but the maid had already made herself scarce the moment Hugo entered. She then remembered the maid’s urging while she was absentminded.

‘I haven’t washed up yet.’

Lucia freed her chin from his grasp to vocalize this to him but before she could speak, he drew closer and blocked her lips. He moved to swallow her lips and grabbed her shoulders. In that motion, he knocked her down onto the bed. She tried to push away from his chest in surprise but her strength wasn’t enough.

He pounced on her at once. His hand lifted her chemise up to her thighs and he placed his knees between her legs, separating them. He did not let go of her lips, following with a deep kiss. His tongue occupied her mouth, moving skillfully and stimulating the insides of her mouth.

As she was drawn into the kiss, the strength in her hand grabbing onto his shoulders gradually weakened. But when his hand began to take off her underwear, Lucia came to her senses.

“Ung...!”

When she began to rebel fiercely, clasping her legs over her excited lower body, his movements stopped. He detangled himself from her chewy tongue, licked her lips lightly and moved a bit away. His gaze swept over her red face and misty eyes and his eyes quivered with desperate desire.

“What is it?” (Hugo)

“I haven’t bathed yet...”

“I don’t care.”

“I care.”

“So. In this state, you’re saying you want to take a bath?”

“Yes.”

Her expression was filled with will showing that by all means, she must have a bath, right now. Hugo sighed.

“Are you doing this on purpose?”

“...What?”

“...Nevermind.”

Really driving someone crazy in all sorts of ways. He lifted his body up from the bed and at the same time, picked her up and lifted her onto his shoulders as though carrying luggage.

“Kyaa! Hugh?!”

He wrapped one arm around her wriggling on his chest while his other hand was placed on her back, holding her onto his shoulders as he went forward with big strides.

No matter how much she struggled, his footsteps did not waver.

“Stay still. You said you wanted to bathe.” (Hugo)

Just like that, he went straight to the bathroom. The bathroom was foggy due to the steam coming off the bathtub filled with boiling water. When he opened the door to the bathroom, the maid inside was surprised but he didn’t pay it any attention.

Seeing the back of the maid, Lucia mumbled, ‘I don’t know’ and covered her face with both hands.

Hugo let her down onto the bathroom floor. She fixed him a heavy glare with a red face while he stripped off her chemise with an indifferent expression.

“Kyyaa-k”

In the blink of an eye she was left with only underwear and quickly covered her chest with her arms. He took one step back and folded him arms, slowly looking her up and down.

Seeing her in full view standing up instead of on the bed was a magnificent view in its own way. Receiving his satisfied and appreciating gaze, she blushed all the way to her neck and took a step back.

He raised a brow and came closer so that they weren't too far apart. Then she moved backwards again. After repeatedly taking steps backwards, her back reached the wall. He stood in front of her, obstructing her so she wouldn't escape anymore. He pressed his arms against her sides so she couldn't escape sideways.

Lucia felt like her heart was going to burst. It wasn't like it was her first time in his arms but the situation and her appearance were so embarrassing and she couldn't look him straight in the eye.

The edges of his lips curled upwards as he watched her looking down, not knowing what to do. She really made him go crazy. He slowly lowered his head, tilting it slightly to the side and kissing her lips lightly. Then again, he brought his lips to hers, giving her another light kiss. Then, he kissed her a little longer. Then, he sucked her lower lips and swept his tongue over her lips.

Her lips separated slightly, hoping for a deeper touch and he gladly responded to her invitation, weaving his tongue into her mouth.

"Ung..."

Her hands that were covering her breasts had at some point moved to lean against his shoulders. The sound of their tongue's entwining and their saliva mixing sounded through the bathroom and gradually grew louder.

Hugo took off the bathrobe he was wearing and threw it onto the floor. His hand slid down her abdomen, lightly pressing down on it as his hand went into her underwear. When his firm fingers pressed inside, the shoulders of Lucia who was absorbed in the kiss shook.

His fingers gently rubbed her wet center and his finger went into her tender entrance. Her arms, wrapped around his neck, tightened in response. In the meantime, he persistently coveted her lips. He lightly nibbled on her small lips then sucked strongly. In a hurry that wasn't a hurry, he meticulously licked over her teeth with his tongue.

At the same time, his fingers went in and out of her moist entrance. He felt the sensation of slippery fluid covering his fingers and he gradually felt himself reaching

the limit of his endurance. From his fingers, he could feel her hot and narrow insides.

He pulled down her underwear and grabbed her thigh, lifting it up a little. As her leg was suddenly in the air, she clung to his neck tighter and her leg swayed. He hugged a little bit upwards and took off the underwear completely. He placed her down against the wall, pressing his body tightly to hers. His lips fell to her ears and his breathing echoed beside her, causing a shiver to run through her skin.

“Hugh... haven’t yet...”

“Prepared bath water is right in front of you. Wash and do or do and wash.”

“How is that the same-”

“Just this once. Husband is about to wither and die here.” (1)

At his exaggeration of pain, a giggle escaped from her and she stopped pushing him aside and leaned onto his shoulders as though giving permission.

‘Nothing like a good scare.’

He mumbled while sighing then lifted one of her legs with his hand.

## Part 2

Hugo mumbled while sighing and lifted up one of her legs with his hand. For a while now, his center had already grown extremely stiff. He lifted up her lower body and plunged inside her with one heavy thrust. Lucia let out a scream at the sudden force coming from below.

“Ah!”

He clenched his teeth and shuddered at the pleasure filling him as he entered her. Her insides always felt like a new experience. He could endure it a little when he’d already moved his waist a few times, but whenever he entered her for the first time, he always had to restrain his desire to rampage inside her.

He moved his waist back and thrust inside her again. His movements were impatient. Every time, he thrust into her vagina, it was intense and her entire body shook.

“Ah! Hk!”

She hung her arms around his neck, clinging to him. She was barely holding herself on the floor with one leg, and every time he pushed, her feet barely touched the floor. The little anxiety when she couldn’t touch the floor contributed to her pleasure. His huge member repeatedly and incessantly plunged deep inside her.

Her ravaged inner flesh felt feverish and every time he touched a sensitive part, she felt like she heard something snap in her head. His desperate movements told her that he eagerly wanted her. In this moment, he wanted her and she also wanted him.

She put more strength into her hands clinging to his neck and lifted her body up. Her hands fumbled upwards from his neck and grabbed onto his hair. She put her lips on his ear and nibbled on his earlobe.

‘I want to taste him.’

She stuck out her tongue and licked the rim of his ear, trailing down to his neck.

“Ng... Vivian.”

His body flinched and he called her name reprovingly. But she did not respond and

licked his neck with more effort. Her lips found where his muscles moved on his neck and she bit it.

“...You started it.”

After saying this, he grabbed her thigh, brought his waist closer and gripped her buttocks. She let out a short scream due to the sudden grasp and held him tighter. He lifted his head and began to thrust in and out, quickly and intensely.

“Hk! Ang! Aah!”

Lucia let out a coquettish cry and her body shook intensely, her eyes unable to focus. Her buttocks were squeezed tightly enough to be distorted and ached and his rough caresses as he kissed and bit her shoulder were scorching. At the same time her head was filled with pleasure and her tears began to fall.

The sound of moaning, screaming and heavy breathing blended together, echoing throughout the bathroom. The nakedness of both man and woman were entwined, moving together in a rhythm. The bathroom was full of steam and heat and their bodies were soaked with sweat.

Hugo set her up against the wall, and tirelessly opened her up. He wildly tore through her vaginal walls as his desire rampaged inside of her without mercy.

“Ah! Hugh!”

Lucia clung onto him with flushed eyes, nuzzling against his shoulder. She wanted to hold him firmly but the sticky sweat on their skin hindered her. She hung onto him with both arms so as not to slip and her body spasmed with pleasure every time he thrust into her.

“Hk!”

Her head tilted backwards as she reached an intense orgasm. Her consciousness momentarily disappeared, plunging her into darkness as she was consumed by the peak of pleasure. Fervent vigor coursed through her whole body, instantly filling her with searing heat. It felt like the insides of her body had been set on fire.

Her inner walls began to spasm like crazy. His body grew rigid and he let out a suppressed groan. His manhood reached its limit and released semen deep into her

womb. Her vaginal walls squeezed and clenched violently, accepting the scorching fluid.

His legs seemed to shake so he leaned a little further on the wall for support. The pleasure filling his head was so intense he closed his eyes and breathed roughly. Her body quivered a little and she panted in his arms.

“Haa... Haa.” (Lucia)

“Huu... damn. I’ll really die like this. You really...” (Hugo)

If they don’t do it, he’ll die, if they do it, he’ll die. (1)

He’d tired out the fragile body of the woman in his bosom. He propped her up as she seemed to have lost all her energy. Hugo hugged her to his chest and the sound of each other’s heart pounding reverberated through their chests.

The sounds of their beating hearts blended together and he couldn’t distinguish between his heartbeat or hers and his emotions were heightened. He hugged her till the heat in their bodies cooled down a little then he stood up with her in his arms and entered into the bathtub.

The boiling water in the bathtub had cooled down to moderately warm during the time they were busy. Lucia sat in the water that was filled to the brim and leaned back on his chest before brush her skin lightly with water.

Apart from the sound of the moving water, the bathroom was quiet and Lucia deeply enjoyed the peacefulness and the feeling of being alone with him, as if they were alone in the world.

“Why did you do that earlier? You looked like you were angry as you checked my face.” (Lucia)

“I thought you were crying because the boy left.” (Hugo)

“What crying. He’s going back because he needs to study.”

When Hugo was able to get rid of the baby fox as a free addition with Damian, he had initially felt completely refreshed but later when he thought about it, she had suddenly lost Damian and the baby fox so she would probably feel dejected. He wondered if he

would have to acquire a new cub for her to be affectionate with. He didn't want to though, so he was worried for a while.

Finally he concluded that if she asked, he would comply but he definitely wouldn't ask her first.

"I will send him letters and gifts. Even if he cannot hear me directly, I would like for him to hear a mother voice from the letters." (Lucia)

'Don't pay him so much attention.' Hugo grumbled inwardly and reached out to squeeze her breasts with his hands. Her body shrunk a little he began to trail light kisses from her neck to her shoulders.

His hands fumbled around her chest and he repeatedly knead her breasts. She let out a small sigh and leaned her head on his shoulders. He lowered his head and softly kissed her lips.

He licked her lips with the tip of his tongue and gave her several short kisses. His fingers kneading her breasts moved to her nipples, twisting it with light force and she let out a small moan.

As she sank into his moderately soft and stimulating caresses, she felt the presence of something poking at her butt and her face flushed red. She stealthily moved her butt forward but he clung to her, drawing closer.

Since she kept inching forward little by little to avoid it but he kept inching forward too, she put her hands behind her and grabbed the annoying thing poking at her behind.

Instantly, his body stiffened and she realized what she had done so her body stiffened too. She couldn't pull the thing caught in her hands nor could she abruptly let it go. She wished he would show some kind of reaction but he stopped and wasn't saying anything so she felt very embarrassed and helplessly flustered.

She turned to him slightly and found his red eyes fixed on her.

"Y... You kept moving so..."

It would be better if he laughed mischievously. In his eyes, she could see a huge wave of fierce passion coursing through it. Vividly feeling his manhood in her hand grow

bigger, she mumbled, 'Oh no' and made a long face. She couldn't bear the feeling of it stirring in her hand as though coming to life so she let go.

The moment she did, he grabbed her arms, turning her to face him and captured her lips. Without any time to breath, he poured kisses and his large hand caressed her whole body. He pressed her shoulders and lifted her waist, placing her on him.

The water made a loud noise as it lurched in response to the movement. Facing her, he grabbed her thighs to lift it up but his hand slipped because of the water's buoyancy. He wrapped his arm around her waist and lifted her body then he turned her around and placed her hands on the edge of the bathtub.

He nibbled on her ear and whispered to her in a subdued tone.

"Hold tight."

Lucia pushed against the bathtub edge with shaky hands. She was swept up in his frantic pace and felt out of breath. From behind her, he grabbed her waist firmly. She bit her lips, readying herself for the incoming shock and feeling the heat coming from behind her, her breath caught in her throat and a shudder ran through her skin.

"Hk-!"

He penetrated her in one stroke from behind and her body shook greatly. Her hands that were supporting her felt like they would break so she put more strength into them. He pulled out and he heavily thrust inside again and her eyes grew misty.

"Ung!"

His firm desire continuously plunged deep inside of her. It filled up her insides completely and her inner flesh wrapped around him tightly. The tip of his penis intensely scraped against her sensitive part. Goosebumps rose on her skin and a refreshing tingling sensation coursed through her body. The pain and pleasure tormented her at the same time.

"A-! Ung! Hugh! Ah!"

Her legs and arms trembled unable to keep up with his unceasing movements. He reached out and placed his hand over hers, weaving them together while his other hand supported her waist.

If it weren't for his support, she would have lost strength in her arms and their position would've collapsed and her body continued to trembled immensely from his repeated waist movements, back and forth.

◊ ◊ ◊

Lying down on Hugo's upper chest, Lucia placed her fingers on his chest wanting to trace a circle but hesitant. She had something she definitely wanted to ask him but she kept flipping back and forth between 'should I? or 'should I not'.

She was curious as to whether Damian had met his biological mother since he came to Duke and if he hadn't, then whether it was because his biological mother did not want to see Damian or because Hugo didn't want him to see his birth mother. No matter how hard she tried, she wouldn't be able to overcome a child's yearning for his birth mother who carried and bore him.

Unless they rejected each other, it would be good for the child if he could meet his birth mother from time to time.

"Hugh, umm..."

Lucia paused, hesitant to continue and Hugo spoke with his eyes closed.

"What is it?"

"Damian..."

He furrowed his brows slightly.

"Don't talk about another man."

"Another man? You said this last time too. He's your son."

"But he's not a daughter."

"...But still, we can't just not talk about Damian at all."

"Don't do it in bed."

"Then when?" Lucia thought to herself, pouting her lips.

The time she could talk with him was limited so if it wasn't at night then when could they talk? He said he didn't hate Damian but she didn't know why he didn't show the loving affection of a father. There was an extent when it wasn't simply inexpression of affection, his was closer to indifference.

The more she thought about it, the more she found Damian commendable. The child grew up so sweet and honest.

"Then, just one thing. There's something I'm curious about." (Lucia)

"Mm."

"Damian's birth mother... has she never asked to see Damian?"

"..."

Was that a question I shouldn't have asked? Lucia was a bit nervous.

"She's dead."

"Ah..."

Lucia was a little shocked.

"So you brought back Damian?"

"Something like that."

"Must have been a beautiful person. Damian's mother, I mean."

"Don't know. Never seen her."

"...What?"

Lucia lifted her head to look at him. At that moment, a troubled expression flashed across his face.

---

Translator Corner:

1) He's referring to sex and just exaggerating. For those who couldn't tell.

# Chapter 48

## Part 1

If Hugo said he didn't remember, Lucia would have simply accepted it. But saying that he had never seen the woman was strange. A chilling sensation ran up her spine.

How does one make a child with a woman one has never seen?

As her silence grew longer, he grew anxious. His slip of the tongue could not be reversed. He'd already shown her a troubled expression and the pause was too long to fix it. If he were to make up an excuse now, she would pretend to believe but remain suspicious.

“Vivian.”

After calling her name, he didn't say anything for a long while. He didn't know how to start the discussion and couldn't get a sense for how much he could tell her and how much she would be able to accept. The thoughts in his head were getting jumbled up.

“Is it difficult to explain?” (Lucia)

“...”

“...Let's go to sleep.”

In Lucia's mind, no matter what relationship he had with Damian's birth mother, she had no right to interfere. She knew he had a son before she married him and also knew that his relationship with Damian's birth mother was an past thing before their marriage, also Damian's birth mother was already dead so there was no need for her to question the subject any closer.

Hugo felt like a dreary wind swept over his chest and gazed vacantly into the dark. His heart ached at her clear attitude of drawing a line. When he realized his slip of tongue, he knew should explain something to her but in that moment, his feeling of bewilderment was rather huge.

'Act like you didn't hear anything' Lucia made her mind up like that and tried to fall asleep but she just couldn't. No matter how hard she thought about his words, she couldn't guess anything. There was no way that Damian who looked so much like him could not be his son.

Was it his way of saying that he didn't remember anything because it was just one night of passion? After all, it wasn't like a child could only be born from an intimate relationship so it was possible. But still, it was the woman that gave birth to his child so not even knowing her face was too much.

Her thoughts simmering deep inside her mind spilled out.

"I guess... you'll forget my face later too."

She projected herself onto Damian's biological mother. His words seemed to say that even if the woman in his past gave birth to his child, she wasn't worth remembering. If so, the worth of Lucia who couldn't bear a child would be worse.

Hugo who had been unable to gather his senses because his mind was unsettled felt his heart jump out of his chest at this sudden bombshell. He had to think it over several times to understand what she was talking about.

"...How did you come to that conclusion?" (Hugo)

"You can't even remember the woman that gave birth to your child."

"It's not like that."

Lucia always told herself over and over, 'You must not be impatient'. The road to loving him would be very long and sometimes, difficult. If she didn't want to tire out, she had to look ahead and take one step at a time.

Any else was fine but when she chanced upon his heartless and cold side, the thought that his heart was still freezing cold would come to mind and her strong will would falter little by little. It was also like this when he behaved indifferently to Damian.

She knew now that he simply didn't express his feelings but before she knew this, she had thought maybe he didn't know about feelings of affection for someone.

And so she felt confusion at his attitude towards her. She knew he didn't hate her.

Perhaps he might even like her quite a bit. But he behaved excessively affectionate and gentle, like a man that had completely fallen in love. From time to time, Lucia would suspect if he was testing her.

“Then, what do you mean by you’ve never seen her? Can a woman you’ve never seen give birth to your child?” (Lucia)

She felt her indignation rise as she spoke and sat up. Hugo then sat up too.

“Vivian, I think you’re a little heated...”

“I’m sorry. I dare to get heated up when it’s not my place.”

Hugo felt his head ache. He had seen her like this before, not too long ago. She was usually mild and gentle but once she became upset, her words became sarcastic and prickly. It was like taking someone off guard and suddenly biting their hand. The surprise was bigger than the agony so rather than feeling upset, he felt absurd.

“Vivian.”

For the time being, he held her shoulders to calm her down. She spun, shaking off his hands off and turning her back to him. The moment she turned her back to him, sparks flew in his eyes. Lucia suddenly felt a strong grip on her shoulder and scowled at the pressure. The strong force pulled her back and in one swift motion pressed her down on the bed. It happened so quickly and when she came to her senses, he was above her and holding her down.

She flinched at the sight of him looking at her with a piercing gaze.

“Don’t... turn around that way.”

“...Huh?”

“Don’t turn your back to me.”

His voice was level and he spoke in a rather low tone but Lucia could somehow grasp his emotional state.

‘He... he’s angry.’

When she thought about it, she had never seen him get angry. When he got angry, he seemed to become calm and get rather chilly. Why did he get angry?

'Because I shook him off and turned away? Could he have been betrayed by someone in the past?'

"I won't do it again."

Lucia replied calmly so as not to stimulate his anger even more.

"Let me go. You surprised me." (Lucia)

"...Sorry."

His rising anger was quickly subsided in a moment. The strength in his arms grabbing her shoulders also lessened and as he withdrew, Lucia sat up slowly. The atmosphere had suddenly come to a lull. In this odd atmosphere, the two of them sat facing each other, not saying anything.

Lucia composed her mind and thought about herself acting up on him out of nowhere.

'I should apologize for being impolite... and go to sleep already. I don't need to put him on edge with pointless psychological warfare.'

"The boy... he's not my biological son."

"...What?"

Hearing his colossal and blunt words, Lucia suddenly felt dizzy.

"Do you mean... Damian? That child... is not your son?"

She couldn't help but try to confirm if the words she heard were correct. Hugo let out a deep sigh and ran a hand through his hair. He didn't her feelings to be hurt over this issue. He didn't want her to greatly misunderstand him over Damian's issue and picture him even worse in her head.

"I heard you asked Jerome about the west tower incident. Did you hear that I had a brother?"

“...Yes.”

“Damian is my brother’s son. In more accurate terms, he’s my nephew.”

In front of the tremendous truth, Lucia’s heart was pounding loudly and her mouth went dry. Suddenly, dozens of questions came to her mind but she couldn’t organize any to formulate a question.

“This fact... Damian...”

“He doesn’t know. Me. And now you too. Other than that, nobody else knows.”

To be more accurate, one more person, Philip, knew but Hugo had no intention of mentioning him.

## Part 2

“So... what you’re saying is, Damian is your older brother’s son.”

“...Right.”

Hugo didn’t exactly know who was the older brother and who was the younger brother. It had never been an issue and no matter who was who, they were brothers all the same so they never had a quarrel as to who was older or younger. If Hugo had to rank it, his dead brother was a slightly more of an elder brother than a younger one.

It wasn’t because of superiority or power. He learnt after meeting his brother that the relationship order between people couldn’t always be separated by force.

“Do you... plan on telling Damian later?”

“Unless the boy asks me first, I don’t want to.”

“Ah... then, I will keep the secret too.”

Lucia nodded earnestly.

‘Then, since Damian isn’t his illegitimate child, there is no reason for Damian to be treated like that.’

Then she thought about it a little more.

‘It would be better to be known as the illegitimate son of the Duke than to be known as son of the immoral individual who murdered the previous Duke.’

Lucia came to an understanding.

“I know you must have thought it strange when you heard about the west tower incident. The incident happened slightly different from what is known. That guy was cornered to a dead end and made an inevitable choice. It was something the previous Duke brought upon himself.”

Lucia’s eyes widened. From his manner of speaking, Lucia could grasp several things. According to the well-known rumor, his twin brother who was abandoned at birth

came back for revenge and murdered his biological father.

But to that brother whom he'd supposedly never met according to rumor, he said 'that guy' expressing their closeness in intimate terms and when mentioning his dead father, he said, 'previous Duke' and chose the phrase, 'brought upon himself'.

When Lucia first heard about this rumor, she got chills thinking of the dead duke's ruthlessness to be able to abandon his own child. She didn't know the exact details but for some reason, she didn't feel the slightest bit uncomfortable by his brother's actions.

"Seems you were close with your elder brother."

Hugo nodded his head after a slight pause.

"Quite close?" (Lucia)

"...Very."

Lucia's heart bubbled over. He wasn't alone with nobody to call family. Although his brother was no longer of this world, there was once family he shared love with. It always weighed on her mind that his childhood was a lonely one and the fact that there was someone he opened his heart to, filled her heart with a warm sense of relief.

"And so you made Damian into your son. Since he's the one and only blood of your brother."

"...It wasn't exactly like that but I can't say it wasn't a reason. There are a lot of complex things concerning my brother and Damian however I can't tell you everything. What I mean is, it isn't that I don't want to tell you because it's you, but to anyone at all. These are things I don't want to reveal even when I die."

His words were longer than usual. Lucia drew closer and placed her hands on the back of his hands.

"It's okay. It is enough to just tell me what you can."

Sometimes, people have secrets they bury in their heart till the day they die. A secret that they would never share, no matter if it was to someone they loved or to their family. Lucia has such a secret.

That she saw the future in a dream, married another man and lived like that, it was a secret she would bury in her heart for the rest of her life.

“If someone knowing your secret brings you pain, you don’t need to do so.”

His gaze on her quivered.

“...but the secret... could cause you pain.”

“Supposing that happens, I’ll turn to you. Then at that time, you can think it over again. Consider whether you can tell me or not.”

“...Okay, I will.”

He grabbed her arms and pulled her into his arms. He hugged her tightly and place his chin on her petite shoulders. Lucia wrapped her arms around his back in return and leaned her head on his shoulder. Without saying a word for a while, they remained hugging each other. It was comfort towards the other and comfort for oneself.

“Damian is your son and also my son. That won’t change. Isn’t that right?”

“En.”

“Is Damian a child born from his parent’s love?”

“So I heard.”

“Then when Damian has grown up and is old enough to understand, let him know. It will be good for the child too.”

“...Alright.”

She leaned on his wide chest and buried her face in his shoulders, feeling a slight sense of shame.

‘Why am I like this... ’

The fact that he’d never had a child with a woman he loved in the past gave her greater joy than compassion for Damian who didn’t really know his parents. Damian was dear to her heart, whether it was before when she thought Damian was really his son or

now that she knew the truth, her feelings hadn't changed.

However, sometimes when she looked at Damian, she couldn't help but wonder who his birth mother was and become curious of the person that gave birth to Hugo's child. And at the same time, the thought that she couldn't bear him a child made her heart ache. She could now understand his reluctant words for a child, regarding it as a 'trace.'

This was his sincerity. He had secrets and wounds in his heart. A cold-hearted father and an elder brother who murdered that father. He may be afraid that his family history may be reoccur if he leaves a bloodline behind.

Just like she was afraid of the future in her dream repeating and chose to make herself infertile.

'I will not be able to become the mother of a child I gave birth to.'

She had given up vaguely although there was some expectation that there was still a chance however it was understandable to give up having learnt of the reason.

A day may come when his wounds heal and he's ready to become a father or that day may never come and he remains of the same heart, forever. It was easier on the heart to think of the worst case scenario.

'But I have become a mother.'

Even if she didn't carry him in her stomach, Damian was her son. She diligently put her rueful heart in order. She tried to transition her mood and pushed away from his chest, looking up at him.

"No wonder I thought Damian somehow didn't resemble you"

"Didn't you say he resembles me exactly some time ago?"

"His appearance, yes. But inside is completely different. Damian is gentle and sweet. But I don't think the words gentle and sweet suit you, don't you think?"

He made an unhappy face then grinned and lifted her head up from her chin then placing a kiss on her lips.

"I'm sweet and gentle to you instead."

His sweet-talk was surprising. Lucia's heart felt tickled and she burst into laughter. He began kissing her all over her face as though asking 'what's so funny?' and Lucia was really tickled this time and burst into laughter again.

"Seeing how much Damian resembles your appearance, late brother-in-law must have been a twin brother who looks exactly like you. How fascinating. There were two of you."

"Why am I 'two'? That guy looked okay on the outside but inside was totally..."

When he saw her brightly watching him, he slurred the end of his sentence.

"...a bit weak-minded..."

Lucia understood it as a different expression of the word 'nice'. As expected, Damian was adorable and sweet, resembling his real father.

"May I ask the name of late brother-in-law?"

When he didn't say anything for a while, she added, "It's okay if you don't tell me."

"...Hiwoo."

"Oh my. It's similar to yours."

"Where is it similar?"

"Hue, Hue, Hugh. If you say it fast, they sound similar." (1)

"..."

"Hugh. Your name is similar to yours and your brother's."

His gaze shook considerably and he threw his arms around her.

"Vivian."

"Yes."

"Vivian."

“Yes.”

‘If this woman is gone, perhaps I would die.’

He realized his heart was no longer his own. His throbbing heart was painful but sweet.

# Chapter 49

## Part 1

*TN: I don't think I've ever mentioned it but things in brackets like this: [], are conversations from the past. Brackets like this: () just tells you who is speaking. I mix it up sometimes but you can usually tell.*

After taking a break for a while, Lucia resumed her activities in high society. Just as before, she opened light tea parties. Nothing changed and just like she'd always done, she invited a wide range of people. Except from a few of the party-break leaders, she put the rest on the invitation list without exceptions.

Lucia showed the authority of the Duchess with her intimidation at the last garden party now, it was time to appease them after her oppression.

She did not wish to reign over the northern high society. But ultimately, she needed to plant herself as an existence that should never be taken lightly.

“Duchess, when do you plan on having a party on a huge scale like last time?”

“My thoughts exactly. I wasn't invited then so I definitely want to attend next time. When the time comes, can I also get introduced to the young lord?”

“I'm afraid the child is no longer in Roam. He left to go study. But if there's an opportunity next time, I will introduce you.”

Lucia replied with a smile and secretly took a glance around. She studied the uneasy expression of the ladies who looked like they were being chased and wouldn't be participating in the discussion anytime soon. They were attendees of previous garden party.

This was already the third tea party but people's behaviors remained similar. They were split into two sides, those who attended the garden party and those that didn't.

The ones that attended all looked uncomfortable and helpless. Their countenance

didn't display reluctance to attend or arrogance, on the contrary, they looked sorry and thankful as they greeted Lucia.

Lucia had no intentions of rebuking them. Just as a soldier's disobedience to command resulted in death, normal women had no power to contest that of leading figures in high society.

And so, Lucia did not mention the events of the garden party so as to not make them uncomfortable but they remained excessively careful of her mood.

In comparison, the ones that did not attend the garden party raised up the topic of Damian as though showing off. They showed no reluctance and constantly and implicitly brought up the child's title of 'young lord'.

The sudden reversed attitude of the women was surprising.

'Is it because he announced publically that Damian is formally entered into the register?'

That was the only guess she could make. As always, the majesty of the Duke was amazing. Lucia did not know that the northern high society went through an enormous stir following the garden party.

It was rumored that the Countess of Wales as well as the tempered elderly wives of the high society that attended the garden party at the time were all secluding themselves at home and when one looked at it, it seemed to be that way. Those crafty old wives seemed to have somehow done something to upset the Duchess' pride and thought to hide themselves.

The rumor that the Taran Duke seized and killed every last one of the regional lords that rebelled against him, including their families, was also secretly spreading in the high society and so the fear that the northern nobles had towards the Taran Duke reached an extreme high. (1)

Hence, the explosive incident at the garden party that occurred in the meantime struck terror into everyone's heart. They imagined the Taran Duke learning of the Duchess' humiliation, and furiously summoning them to all be clubbed to death. After all, there was a connection between the Lady of the House losing face and the Head of the Family's pride.

Whether the rumor of the Ducal Couple's intimate matrimonial relationship was true or not, the Taran Duke had proved to at least belong to one of the examples. Originally, the House of the Taran Duke was closed off.

From generation to generation, the Taran Dukes were not interested in having close relationships with northern nobles as well as entering into politics in the capital.

The Taran Duke was an existing but intangible ruler. When the Taran Duke was not in the north due to war, the northern nobles held little interest in their intangible ruler. However, when there was a show of force and someone actually died, the social circle was shaken and people became desperate.

They wished to grasp the heart of their ruler and guarantee their safety. Presently, the only private connection to the current Duke was the Duchess who was engaging in social activities.

The ladies were given special instructions from their husbands or fathers and attended the Duchess' tea party. It was a scene of chaos trying to secure a position on the list of invitees just before the Duchess threw her third tea party.

Even though her surroundings were as if attacked by a typhoon, the one at the center of the typhoon, Lucia, was calm. Nevertheless, the one who usually informed her in detail of the happenings, Kate, was shutting her mouth and watching the situation unfold.

To be exact, it wasn't that something precise had happened but that the atmosphere in high society had become restless so what to tell Lucia was vague. She couldn't say to Lucia, 'your husband is terrifying so everyone is shaking in their boots'.

"The Duchess shines more beautifully as the days goes on."

Someone leaked out flattery and a competitive spirit could be felt rising in the air among the women.

"Oh, I have admired the Duchess' beauty since the day we first met."

"Hoho. Appearance isn't all to a person. The Duchess has a mind beautiful beyond appearance."

A flame was lit amongst the women. The shameless and smooth tongued women

heaped praises on the Duchess without exception and the timid women could not come forward as they were indecisive and couldn't find a proper time to butt in. It was war.

Lucia took no regard of their overheated atmosphere and carefreely drank her tea. She wasn't an immature child that would become giddy and graceless from a few words of flattery. She had watched this situation happen enough times in her dream to be sick of it.

In her dream, she had never been at the center. She also couldn't become a follower as her personality wasn't one to beat around the bush. However, while observing the ridiculous spectacle from a distance, she either found it amusing or pathetic.

‘The position of the Duchess is truly incredible.’

When Lucia did not show any reaction, the women began to close their mouths one by one. Those with tact gradually became aware that unlike her appearance, the Duchess was not an easy person to deal with.

“I’m truly thankful for all your kind words. Rather, is there anything interesting in the circles lately?”

“Let me tell you. Some time ago-”

“You can’t call that interesting. I heard...”

This time, the women were trying to up on another with hot news in the social circles.

Lucia tilted her head, ‘Today’s tea party is really strange.’

## Part 2

In the afternoon, Captain Elliot submitted a report. Its contents were related to the past poisoning incident that was mistaken for an epidemic. The incident was resolved smoothly.

After finding the root of the problem and digging into it, there was no sign of ill will. All the mushrooms obtained were retrieved and disposed of. The upper-end person in charge was to be fined a large amount of money as punishment for gross negligence.

“Any other villages harmed?”

“Apart from the two villages discovered at early stages, none yet. Since the upper levels has been mostly examined, I don’t imagine there will be further damages in the future.”

The report was requesting approval from Hugo so that the incident to be finalized. The top figure at the root of the problem was under investigation and their feet were bound.

If Hugo were to give his approval, the principal figure would have to pay compensations plus fines and would be able to restart their activities in the upper levels.

It was practically the same as asking the principal figure to pay a significant amount of money without complaints and expecting no more problems.

However, having a certain name enter Hugo’s eyes was the beginning of misfortune for the top figure waiting for the trade approval to come through.

“...Wales? Is the principal owner, the Count of Wales?”

“Yes.”

It was the rule that no matter the owner, upper-end affairs were to be resolved by commercial law. A business transaction issue was resolved with money and as long as the owner did not go bankrupt, no responsibility was given to the owner’s family.

The fact that Hugo now knew the name of the person at the top was related to the reason of having no need for concerned.

A dark spark was lit in Hugo's eyes. Because he saw her crying figure, he harbored a huge grudge towards the ringleader of the garden party incident. Because of his wife's beseechment, he couldn't interfere time and time again, so he felt vexed. Since he had finally chanced upon a case, he clung tenaciously to the long-awaited opportunity.

Through one channel or another, he knew about the garden party incident in relatively good detail. Naturally, he also knew that the prime leader at that time was the Countess of Wales. Just as he was considering how to warn the old snake, he had caught an unbelievable case.

Hugo commanded with a grave expression.

“This case cannot be passed over lightly.”

“Then...”

“I’m afraid I cannot erase the thought that there was a certain intention behind this matter. Thoroughly investigate the past transaction details, including the taxes paid.”

“By thoroughly, you mean...”

“Down to the last detail. Shake the dust out.”

Elliot was a typical knight, insensitive to plots or trickery however in this matter, his Lord seemed to have noticed something to watch for.

He didn't know why but that top figure was certainly marked by his Lord. Somehow Elliot felt sympathetic.

“Understood. I will investigate thoroughly.”

Subordinates who assisted the Duke in close proximity were rather familiar with the Duke's character. The Duke was definitely not a magnanimous and virtuous person. He was indifferent in most cases however once he locked onto something and began to dig into it, he was closer to persistent and obstinate.

In other words, he held long grudges.



It was a month and a half since Damian left for the Academy. Damian was hardly gone before Lucia wrote him a letter and received a reply to it about 20 days later.

Today, she received his reply to the second letter she sent him. Lucia's heart pounded as she opened the envelope. Its contents, full of pages fell out. When she read the first line of the letter starting with, 'To Mother' she trembled and hugged the letter to her chest.

As she read the letter step by step, her face blossomed, full of smiles. The letter's contents seemed like some kind of report. What was taught in class, what was eaten, who he had a conversation with.

Lucia felt happy as she read the rigid contents that expressed little emotion. She felt like she could see into the child's livelihood.

— The day is getting colder. Be careful about your health. Sincerely, Damian.

When the lengthy letter came to an end, Lucia felt a huge sense of regret.

“He seems to be doing well so I’m glad.”

The end of the year was approaching so Lucia was preparing a gift to send to Damian.

“Milady, a guest requests to see you.”

A maid announced to her. If it was Lady Milton that came, the maid would not say it was a guest.

“A guest? Who?”

“It is the Countess of Wales.”

Lucia knit her brows slightly. She didn't know why the Countess of Wales would commit an act of rudeness and suddenly come to find her. She considered sending her back but finally settled on listening to what business the Countess had and if it was nonsense, to kick her out.

The maid served tea. Lucia did not call for Jerome. She didn't want to serve the

delicious tea that Jerome prepares to the Countess of Wales. Unlike Lucia who sat with a slightly chilled attitude, the Countess of Wales looked intimidated. In the time they hadn't seen, her face had grown quite haggard.

Perhaps a cold? Lucia was suspicious of the Countess' very different complexion from the past garden party.

“What brings you here?” (Lucia)

“It was discourteous of me to suddenly request a meeting like this. Has Duchess been well in the meantime?”

“There’s no reason why I wouldn’t be well. Frankly, I am dissatisfied with Countess. It was my first party prepared on a large scale. Surely, madam won’t deny having a sizeable responsibility for it ending in such a way?”

“What can I say? When one gets old, sometimes one’s ability to judge falls. I came to find Duchess in hopes that one can generously overlook this matter.”

Lucia, who had purposefully come on strong, weakened her icy expression at the Countess acting humble.

“Is this what today’s visit is in regards to?”

“Yes. I came to apologize.”

Lucia didn’t know the Countess of Wales would docilely lower herself like this. As the Countess was older and a leading figure in the circles, Lucia tried to gradually apply pressure rather than having a head-on confrontation.

‘Something is strange here...’

The rather unusual intimidated attitudes of the other ladies was already weighing on her mind and since even the Countess of Wales was like this, perhaps there was something she was missing.

“If that’s all you really want, I understand. I will accept Countess’ apology. However, I do not wish to talk for long today.” (Lucia)

“Ah... I...”

“Do you have more to say?”

“To Duchess... there is something I would like to sincerely request...”

A request? Really, how shameless. Lucia chuckled sarcastically to herself. In any case, the Countess of Wales seemed to see her as meek and naïve child. Lucia was not a good girl that would not take any action. She had a fairly cold side in her relationships with people.

“I do not take private special requests.”

“It is not a special request, Duchess. Please relieve the anger of His Grace the Duke.”

“I don’t know what you are talking about.”

The Countess revealed that the top-levels owned by her family were currently encountering difficulty. The explanation was lengthy and mostly self-justification. However, from the congested story, Lucia grasped the key point.

“The top committed a blunder and was punished. Are you now associating your personal feelings with the official work of His Grace the Duke?”

“No. No. The guilt is not being denied. I know the Duke is indeed a thorough person that separates business and pleasure. But he is a little strict so I ask of you to have some mercy. Please forgive this old one for hurriedly rushing over without principle.”

After the Countess of Wales left, Lucia fell into deep thought. In the first place, from the perspective of the one being punished, a generous punishment did not exist. From what she could tell, it wasn’t that fault was being found with an innocent man.

Punishment of crime was within the scope of authority of the Duke of Taran who was the overseer of order in the North.

The thought that maybe he was punishing them excessively because of her did not cross her mind for a second. She wasn’t that conceited.

‘So he’s quite strict on the people under him.’

Lucia couldn’t imagine it since she had never seen that side of him. In any case, the reason the ladies have been so careful of her mood lately must also be because of this.

Perhaps they happened upon his strict side several times recently.

Lucia filed it in her head to ask him in passing. She didn't really take it seriously.

---

Translator's Corner:

\*Lucia does not refer to the countess as 'madam' but as 'wife'. It's a kind of title that doesn't translate well to English.

# Chapter 50

## Part 1

The weather grew cold so it became hard to take a walk in the garden after dinner. Lucia didn't have to worry about what to do with her spare time though, rather, every time she was free, she fell in love with knitting.

It was a scarf wanted to send to Damian as a year-end gift as well the for New Year's. She worked diligently so she could send it at approximately the right time.

Since she couldn't care for the garden or take a walk, she poured all her remaining time into the completion of the scarf.

After taking a bath, Lucia waited for Hugo in the bedroom but even after more time than usual passed, he did not come. As the end of the year approached, he grew remarkably busier.

He either came into the bedroom late or sometimes sent word through the maid for her to sleep first.

Then he would try to stubbornly demand for the one-in-five rest day to be replaced with the missed day but Lucia did not listen to that demand.

This was because she knew that once she listened, there would be no end.

She asked the maid to bring her knitting basket because it seemed like he would be coming in late. She sat on the bed and began to weave the wool into the shape of a scarf.

“What's that?”

At some point, Hugo came in and was attentively watching the knitting in her hands. She had been completely engrossed in knitting and did not notice him when he came in.

She quickly clean up and arranged the materials into the basket.

“Knitting. I’m knitting a scarf. I want to send it to Damian.”

A wool-knitted scarf. It was an item that was never necessary for Hugo. He wasn’t sensitive to cold so even in the winter, he didn’t wear special winter clothing, much less a scarf for children. Perhaps even the gift recipient Damian would have to make conscious effort to wear that around.

Her choice of white pattern on a red background showed how much she treated Damian like a little child. He felt a little sorry but he had no choice but to have Damian wear it throughout the winter.

He’ll have to check through the escort planted at the boy’s side to make sure the boy really wear it. Hugo entertained villainous thoughts in his mind.

Although Hugo didn’t want a scarf, he couldn’t move his gaze from where she moved to place the basket of knitting wool under the bed. He sent off Damian, got rid of the baby fox as a free bonus but she did not return to being entirely his like he thought.

He didn’t know why there was so many places for her to devote her attention to. When she got a letter from the boy, she was full of obvious excitement for a few days.

‘She’s my woman before she is the boy’s mother’

He was dissatisfied with the attention she poured on Damian. He couldn’t exactly put it in words so he grumbled inwardly. Moreover, she still had not told him her childhood name.

‘But I told you my secret. Although not all of it’

It wasn’t like there had to be a trade-off but...

‘Why does that boy, Damian know but I don’t?’

He could never understand where that kid was better than himself.

“Did you learn knitting at a young age?”

Lately, Hugo used any opportunity he had to ask about her childhood. He was

stubbornly determined to hear her childhood name directly from her mouth. He didn't want to ask upfront as he felt like if she told him personally, it was evidence that she'd opened her heart to him to some extent.

"Yes. Which is why my skill isn't that great. I learnt from casually observing my mother at the side."

"You said you lived alone with your mother when you were young, right?"

"Yes. Until I entered the palace."

"Then your mother... what did she..."

Hugo hesitated slightly then threw out a thinly-veiled question.

"Usually... what were you called? By your mother..."

This wasn't cheating. He didn't directly ask what her childhood name was.

"As a child, rather than call my name, she called me, my baby, cutie or daughter."

Since he didn't grow up feeling his mother's affections, he was probably curious of normal mother-child relationships. This was how Lucia thought of it. As she recalled memories with mother, a smile rose onto her face.

Today again, his leading questions failed. Hugo sighed inwardly, disappointed.

"Ah, there's something I want to confirm with you. You didn't forget your promise with me, right? The promise that you won't interfere with the matters of the garden party." (Lucia)

"I didn't forget."

"Really?"

"Of course."

Hugo answered confidently. There wasn't a single thing on his conscience. Summoning his vassals and telling them to put more effort into supervising their household was well enough within his capability as a superior giving advice.

There was no hesitation in his replies so Lucia believed him. Her husband was more trustworthy to her than the Countess of Wales.

“I heard something weird but it guess it was just a groundless rumor.”

“What rumor?”

“It says you struck a blow to the Count of Wales’ upper-end businesses because of the garden party issue. Well, something like that. But there’s no way that’s the case. You’re someone who thoroughly distinguishes between private and public matters, after all.”

“...Of course.”

He really had nothing on his conscience. Even though the upper-end was thoroughly investigated two-fold and three-fold because of the problem caused by the poisoning case, it was an official matter. The fact that the principal owner was the Count of Wales was just an added bonus. Despite that, he couldn’t answer without any hesitation. Lucia was unable to catch the sour look that flitted across his face.

Not long after this, the upper-end businesses of the Count of Wales’ family were acquitted after a persistent investigation.

The originally imposed levy was as before however; simply being able to resume activities in the upper-level before the New Year came around was something to be thankful for.

The rumor that the Taran Duke stood behind the Duchess was now solidifying into an established theory in the northern social circles.

## Part 2

The aide assumed a solemn expression as he spoke.

"Your Highness, Crown Prince, Marquis of DeLing sent an official letter of complaint."

Kwiz clicked his tongue and skimmed through the document handed to him. In conclusion, the long letter of complaint that went on and on for pages was requesting permission to punish the Knight Krotin who insulted the honor of the Marquis.

A while ago, Knights of Deling jumped Roy and were beaten half-dead so they couldn't move for several months.

"Why do these filthy bastards that attack in groups have so much to say? Is it still a proper knight if it jumps a single opponent with numbers?"

The aide couldn't adapt to the Crown Prince spitting out the vulgar jargon of the common people every time it happened.

The aide controlled his expression and continued speaking.

"It is not the duel itself they have an issue with, but Sir Krotin's remarks."

"I'm sure what they want to deal with isn't Sir Krotin."

Marquis of DeLing was one of the representative figures of the opposition against the Crown Prince. If opposing side could use this matter to remove the Knight Krotin from the Crown Prince's side, there were many things to gain from it.

They could make a crack in the authority of the Crown Prince who was unable to protect his escort Knight, they could aim for a gap in the Crown Prince's defenses after he lost a remarkably skilled escort and because the Crown Prince was unable to safeguard the escort handed to him by the Taran Duke, they could make a crack form in the two's relationship.

Kwiz turned his gaze to Roy standing next to him.

Even though Roy obviously knew they were talking about him, his expression didn't change as if he wasn't hearing anything. Sometimes, the aide felt the desire to beat up

Roy's brazen face.

"Sir Krotin. Don't say anything after beating those knights. Good going there. It isn't like you killed them yet those jumping bastards have the nerve. But, why did you say that?" (Kwiz)

"Say what?" (Roy)

"It is said you called the knights, dogs of the Marquis."

"I didn't say that. I said dogs licking their master's feet."

Kwiz groaned.

"That is virtually the same thing. Isn't that why the Knight of the DeLing Marquis jumped you? Saying you insulted the Marquis."

"I don't know why that is insulting. I simply spoke the truth. A Knight is their master's dog. Like a dog, all one has to do is wag their tail to their master and listen nicely. I only said my mind since they were going around picking fights with uninvolved people."

Not only the Crown Prince, but everyone around was taken aback.

"A knight is their master's dog? Does Sir Krotin think so of yourself?" (Kwiz)

"Oh yes. I am my Lord's dog. If he asks me to bark, I bark. Woof-woof."

Kwiz burst out laughing. He grabbed his stomach and smacked the table as he laughed. However the expression of the other escorting knights besides Roy were distorted and they fixed Roy with murderous gazes.

After laughing till tears came to his eyes, Kwiz took a while to calm down then spoke to his aide.

"Did you hear that? Write it well that Sir Krotin did not insult any knight and send back the letter of complaint."

"...Yes."

Without doubt, the damn man was a lunatic. No, he was a mad dog? The aide made up his mind to never mess around with Knight Krotin if possible. After all, one avoids shit because it's dirty. (1)

"I envy the Taran Duke. To have such a loyal knight."

Kwiz glanced over his knights with a meaningful gaze. The knights who met his gaze for a moment turned their gaze to empty air.

"But the Taran Duke has confined himself to the north with no thoughts of coming up to the capital. I thought even if it was the Duchess, one would at least come once."

It was nearly a year since the Duke got married and two months had passed since the New Year began. He was fascinated by how the princess who lived in palace was enduring so well in the north.

He thought she would be unable to tolerate the frustration and even if alone, she would drop by the capital. Through the description of the people who had seen Princess Vivian directly, he knew the princess was far from being a lady of unsurpassed beauty. Even so, he couldn't shake off his doubt as to whether that rumor was true or not.

'Is she so beautiful that the Duke is hiding her tightly? Or is it just preference? But looking at his past history with women, something's totally different.'

Kwiz found very little success in digging into Princess Vivian. He learnt the Princess went out of the palace pretending to be a maid but as it cost more time and money to keep digging even further, he simply gave up.

If it was an enemy, he would look into every nook and cranny but there was no need to do so for someone on his side. In any case, they would meet when once she came up to the capital.

'Acting as a maid to go out. You do quite the interesting things.'

Kwiz held a favorable impression towards this younger sister of his he never knew existed.

◊ ◊ ◊

In the capital where incidents happened without pause, Fabian was working hard today as usual. Today, he was doing his favorite work: the task of gathering the rumors circulating in the capital.

“Hoh, this is new. There’s a summoning circle to raise the devil under the Taran Duke’s castle?”

Fabian snickered and wrote down all the unfiltered rumors in his report to the Duke. Fabian also studied the report from his men. As he looked through the report, his expression stiffened. The report was from his men planted around the female novelist.

As she was the only acquaintance to the princess who became the Duchess, Fabian ordered his men to check up on Norman regularly. This was because someone who chanced upon her relationship with the Duchess might choose to approach her and cause her harm. On the other hand, he was also able to use this to confirm that the female novelist was tight-lipped about the Duchess. So, in a way, it was a form of surveillance and protection.

“Why did the Countess of Falcon go there? And not just once or twice.”

According to the report, the Countess’ purpose for visiting the female novelist was because she was a fan of her novel.

‘I don’t think that’s the only reason though...’

Fabian’s sharp sense was telling him so.

‘Anyhow, she’s a really difficult one.’

Since a long time ago, the Countess always left a bad taste in his mouth. The fact that he disliked her ominous past history of marrying three times with all 3 husbands currently dead, was just secondary. Sometimes one happens to dislike a person for no reason. To Fabian, the Countess of Falcon was such a person.

There was the option of observing the situation over time but Fabian decided to file it in his report. The biggest reason for Fabian’s capability was his speedy situational judgements. He judged that he should not carelessly disregard news related to the Duchess.

At this point, he now knew that that the Duke was not playing newly-wed. For the Duke to share a bed with one woman for over 10 months? It was unprecedented. The Duke was not a womanizer. This was how Fabian saw it. The Duke simply satisfied his instinctive desires. He never had the slightest emotional exchanges with women.

Just the thought that such a Duke would possibly be settling down with a woman made Fabian feel like he'd glimpsed into the mysteries of life.

‘Truly, the more you live, the more you learn.’

---

Translator Corner:

1. This is a Korean proverb I have heard one time too many. One avoids shit(feces) because it's dirty. The full idiom goes something like ‘One doesn't avoid shit because one is afraid of it but because it's dirty.’ It means one isn't avoiding an opponent because they are scared or afraid but because there is no value to being entangled and nothing good will come of it.

# 【THE TARAN DUKE'S FAMILY DOCTOR】

# Chapter 51

## Part 1

*TN: 'Employees' is changed to 'servants'.*

Several months passed since Anna and Philip's steady exchanged continued. Anna found Philip for teaching whenever she had free time and Philip admired Anna's great passion for learning at such an advanced age.

Once a week, Anna and Philip went to offer their medical services to the poor and needy. Just like always, they set up a simple treatment room in a remote location at the back of an alley and received a flood of patients. It was difficult but as Anna treated patients with all sorts of diverse symptoms, her skills dramatically increased.

“Look here, don’t you think the stupid thing is to say you ate mugwort to make medicine?”

The voice of a hot-tempered middle-aged wife rang out loudly. The simple treatment room had two tables set slightly apart and in between them, a thin cloth acted as a wall. So when one raised their voice a little bit, one could be heard from the other side.

On the other side of the wall, Anna payed attention to the audible voice of the patient who came to Philip.

“Did I know and eat it? I only knew it had wild herbs.”

“Are your eyes crooked? How does that thing look like herbs!”

“Why did you leave it in the kitchen then!”

Mother and daughter went back and forth, raising their voices to each other as they quarreled.

Mugwort! Anna paused treatment on her side and fixed her gaze on the obscuring wall of cloth. Then she heard Philip's calm voice.

“So what is the matter? Did you perhaps contact an ailment?”

“Aiyo! Doctor! This one ate that thing and her monthly period didn’t come. I don’t know what to do if this lass cannot perform her duties as a woman so I can’t sleep at night.”

“Tch, I like it this way.” (Daughter speaking)

“You crazy thing, ah! Do you want to be a lady that can’t give birth?”

Anna suddenly sprang to her feet. She didn’t notice the confused expression of her patient who was being treated. Anna lifted the wall made of cloth and went into the other partition.

Philip glanced at Anna once then spoke to the patient.

“I cannot treat you if you’re making so much fuss. Quietly. How much mugwort did patient eat?”

“About as much as a side dish? I mixed it up with vegetable and ate it.”

Her mother next to her: ‘This crazy-! How can you happily eat that foul-tasting thing and call it vegetable? Aiyo, I didn’t give birth to a human, I birthed a good-for-nothing. Ai! I can’t live in peace.’

She continued to grumble inwardly.

“When did you have your first menstruation?”

“I think the year before last?”

“You didn’t keep eating the mugwort, did you?”

“No.”

“Then, this is just a temporary state, your menses will start again next month. So you don’t need to be worried. You too, Mother.”

Both mother and daughter were in disbelief so they had to be persuaded and promised several times before they left.

“What’s wrong, Anna? Is there a patient with a problem?” (Philip)

“...No. I’ll tell you later.”

After they finished giving free treatment, the day was darkening into night and the two returned and drank tea at Philip’s residence.

“Earlier... I mean the patient who took mugwort. That was my first time seeing such a symptom but Sir Philip seemed to know all about it. I know mugwort has a hemostatic effect but for that to stop menstruation? How could that be when menstruation and the blood from wounds are from completely different structures?” (Anna)

“It’s rare but occasionally, it occurs in patients. It can happen when the poor hunger and don’t distinguish between what they eat. However, there’s nothing to worry about. There’s nothing wrong with the body, it’s just a temporary state.”

“Then, by any chance, do you know of menstruation stopping entirely after eating mugwort?”

Philip’s hand lifting the teacup to his mouth paused for a moment. The mysterious glint in his eyes disappeared just as fast as it came. His relaxed smile was just as before and his voice was just as relaxed as he spoke.

“Interesting. Do you have such a patient?”

“Yes, in state of complete amenorrhea (absence of menstrual periods). The herb intake was for quite the long time.”

In the meantime, Anna had purchased hundreds of medicinal books in order to find a cure for the Duchess. She scrapped up all the books on the market and not only that, she asked around for the doctors living in Roam (city) and went to them diligently. However, there was not one person who recognized the symptom of menstruation stopping after eating mugwort.

Anna would have rather preferred to experiment the diet on herself but unfortunately, she was already in her menopause and because she didn’t know the side effects, she couldn’t test it on another person.

So, it was both surprising and frustrating to stumble across that patient today. If she knew beforehand, she would’ve gone digging through the slums. Anna admired Philip

anew.

[How did you obtain such excellent medical skill? You know much of what is in the books and what is not in the books.]

The more she knew, the more amazed she was by Philip's medical knowledge so one day, she asked him directly.

[There are simply a lot of miscellaneous things I picked along the way when I was wandering around.]

Philip spoke modestly but Anna thought of it as his reward for wandering the hinterland to offer his medical services. He was really an excellent doctor.

“Philip, didn’t you say you treated a lot of patients while traveling? I feel very embarrassed in comparison. True medicine should be performed with the heart yet my lowly medicine is priced with greed.”

“Anna, your medical skill is superb. You are enthusiastic and true to your patient. It is a shame you don’t receive proper recognition because you are a woman.”

“You speak too highly of me.”

Anna smiled and brought the teacup to her mouth. If Anna had seen Philip's eyes then, she would have felt strange. The pupils of his eyes flickered silently, revealing his impatience.

“Who is the patient?” (Philip)

Anna hesitated. Keeping a patient's confidentiality was the duty of a doctor. However, Anna couldn't let go of the only and definite clue that she'd barely managed to fine. The longer she couldn't grasp a clue, the more anxious she felt. No one was urging her but she felt agitated.

‘It’s okay. He’s the Duke’s doctor and one with excellent medical skills. He’s a true doctor who finds the poor to offer his medical services.’

She didn't know why he was under surveillance, but if he was someone who would harm the Duke, it wouldn't just end with surveillance. She made up her mind. Still, she felt too uncomfortable to readily mention the madam.

“To be honest, I came to find you at first because I wanted some advice on this symptom.”

If the Duchess' doctor was seeking advice from another doctor, without one even saying who the patient was, it was obvious. Anna nodded her head to Philip who was quietly looking at her.

“By any chance... was the mugwort taken from the first menstrual period?”(Philip)

“You know!”

Anna yelled out cheerfully.

“Do you know a way to treat it?”

“Fortunately, I do.”

“My goodness!”

The treatment she'd been looking for all this while had been right next to her. If she had honestly asked for advice from the beginning, she would have gotten it without going through so much trouble.

However, she didn't regret the time spent going through that trouble. Searching for books and digging through them were of great help to her skills.

“How did the patient happen to take mugwort?” (Philip)

“The patient wasn't knowledgeable as a child and did not know of the changes in a woman. Summarily, in the patient's young mind, it was a drug that stopped bleeding so one tried to fix the first menstruation.”

“How long was this intake?”

“I heard it was taken for about half a year, after which there was no more menstruation. Is it really possible to treat?”

“Listen a little longer. This symptoms require special conditions to be treated. One must not be a virgin and one must not have experienced union with more than one man.”

Anna's expression fell. The symptom itself was already strange now even the treatment condition was strange too. Because of Anna's experience treating the Duchess, she knew of the Duchess' purity better than anyone else.

But this matter was privately hidden and concerned the Duchess' reputation. She hesitated for a while but in the end she chose her belief that as doctor, if one was embarrassed about their patient's condition, one would not be able to treat their patient properly.

"That won't be a problem. The patient was married some time ago and the first night was the patient's first union."

Anna stubbornly did not directly mention who the patient was but they were both understanding each other.

"Then, does this mean it can be treated?" (Anna)

Philip lowered his gaze a little and said nothing in reply. Anna waited quietly, not wanting to interfere with his thoughts. But in actuality, Philip was only trying to calm his overwhelmed and turbulent emotions. After some time, he lifted his head with a calm expression.

"It's possible."

"I'll go see Milady immediately. I'm sure she will be much pleased I have found a cure."

As though she would get up any minute now, Anna shuffled in her seat restlessly. She didn't even realize that she had directly said who the patient was. Philip used a hand gesture to tell her to calm down.

"This treatment is one of the visions passed down in our family. The exact method of preparation is in the notebook passed down and I have to check but I don't have it right now. I put it someplace else. It looks like I'll have to leave for a while."

Anna felt regretful. She was filled with impatience as she didn't want to lose the clue she'd finally gotten.

"Will it take long? Is it possible for me to go with you?"

"I apologize but I cannot take you with me. It is a secret location passed down in our

family for generations."

"I was too impatient. I'm sorry for making an unreasonable request."

"There's no need to be in a rush. I will definitely give you the treatment. Therefore, in the meantime, don't tell the patient. There's no need to make one wait in vain."

"You're right. When do you expect to be back?"

"At the latest, I will be back in a week."

## Part 2

After Anna left, Philip sat on the sofa with his head low and hands clasped tightly together. The lights were off in the sitting room causing it to be dimly lit. In this lighting, the silhouette sitting like a doll in the dreary atmosphere was enough to frighten any who saw it.

“Kuhuhuhu...”

Philip’s body began to tremble and he burst out laughing like a madman.

“Kuhahaha!! It’s not the end! It’s not over yet!”

It was not the usual Philip that kept his emotions in check without losing his calm expression. His eyes were bloodshot and the veins on his forehead bulged. Like an evil spirit, his expression was distorted, full of madness and obsession.

He discovered a possibility for the obsession he’d half-way given up on, so he was overwhelmed with excitement.

After the former Duke met a tragic death and the new Duke succeeded him, Philip was one day kidnapped by a suspicious person. When he woke up after fainting, he found himself locked up in a prison. He was imprisoned for the whole day. And the person that showed up in front of him in the prison was Hugh, the one who had become the Taran Duke.

[Old man. I hear you know the way to make a child? Tell me. I combed through that cursed room but it wasn’t there.]

The Hugh Philip saw after he became the Duke had changed. Deep rooted disgust and hatred overflowed in his eyes. Philip came to realize that the cause for this was the room which Hugh referred to as ‘that cursed room’. It was the room that contained secrets of the Taran bloodline.

[You entered the secret room.]

[That’s right. It was really interesting, you know? The girl that the late Duchess had in her womb was supposed to carry my child in the future. It’s truly a shame. My future wife didn’t get to see the light of the day and was turned into a lump of flesh to be

thrown away in her mother's stomach. If I knew, I would have at least checked her face. I mean, since the Duchess' stomach was practically bulging, there must have been some kind of shape.]

Unlike his words, the Duke's expression looked nauseous like he couldn't stand the mere thought.

[Indeed a huge secret and according at those scribbled documents, the Duchess must give birth to a son so she could never be an ordinary woman. But this time, was it because my mother died? Then, if one bore a daughter, one would not be able to raise it publicly and can only hide it away.]

Philip did not give any response or acknowledgement. The late Duchess had indeed planned that as soon as her daughter was born, she would treat it like it were dead and raise it outside.

The Duke continued with his inference of Philip's thoughts.

[And since that girl and I differ greatly in age, I don't believe she would be left alone with me. That old fogey would have probably made me marry a woman that'll give birth to the girl that would be my son's bride in the future. But, if it goes this way, the woman that gives birth to my son, the woman with the oh so precious Taran blood, becomes a mistress. And her son becomes an illegitimate child. There's no way such a flaw would be allowed. So, on a second thought, the wife that gives birth to my daughter will probably end up dead in time. Whether by sickness or by accident. And my step-sister that grew up well outside will come in as my second wife and give birth to my son. What do you think? Did I hit the nail on the head?]

[...]

[But what can one do? Since my step-sister is dead, my son won't be born. Forever.]

Looking at the extremely delighted Duke, Philip did not reveal that the child of the late young master Hugo was conceived and growing up nicely. If the Duke knew now, he would kill both mother and son immediately.

[But a daughter can still be born as usual. You disgusting bastards will do anything to make me have a daughter without hesitation. Now tell me, Old man. How this monstrous family came to retain such a tenacious bloodline. I don't plan on leaving anything carrying my filthy blood behind on this land.]

Philip could predict what the Duke would do if he told him the truth about the mugwort. Even if it sounded impossible, he would try to root out all the mugwort that existed in the world, and if he really needed a woman, to avoid future troubles, he would either embrace a prostitute once then get rid of her, or avoid embracing the same woman more than once. In this way, the possibility of the Taran bloodline continuing would disappear.

[If you want stay locked up and never see the sun again, keep your mouth shut.]

Philip would never divulge his family's secrets and using the pretext that he couldn't resist under the Duke's threat, he spun a tale.

[The Taran male that will become the father of the child has to steadily administer his blood to the woman for over a year, then take her virginity.]

And the Duke believed those nonsensical words. From this, one could guess how much the Duke thought of the Taran blood as a sickening monster.

Since the Duke thought that pregnancy was impossible without himself voluntarily acting on it, he treated Philip like a completely non-existent person afterwards. Making the most of this indifferent approach, Philip did not stop trying to progress to his goal.

Those of Taran blood inherited madness in their blood from generation to generation. It caused one to urge for slaughter or increased one's sex drive. In the Duke, the extent was severe and it got even worse after his brother's death. By the second half of his late teens, it was to the extent that the Duke couldn't sleep without slaughter or sleeping with a woman.

Philip bought a young orphan beggar and prepared her body by feeding her mugwort. He taught her sexual practices to match the Duke's tastes and knowing that the Duke did not like maidens, he took measures using his family's secret manual to prevent virgin blood from flowing out.

Just in time, war broke out, becoming an opportunity and Philip's access to the Duke became much easier. He fed the prepared woman pain-killing drugs so she wouldn't feel the pain of breakthrough (*TN: pain from first sex*) and sent her into the Duke's quarters. The Duke, excited from the madness of slaughter, did not care who the woman let into his quarters was and united with her.

But Philip's attempts always ended in failure. For pregnancy to happen, the Duke had to have a steady relationship with a woman but the Duke was quick to lose interest. The amount of unsuccessful women Philip had killed to silence numbered more than a dozen.

As the war came to a lull, the Duke began to gradually temper his recklessness and lack of self-restraint. It could be that by seeing his fill of blood through the war, his thirst was somewhat relieved or it could be due to the Duke entering his mid-twenties. His preference also changed to luxurious noble women so he only took women like those to bed.

No matter how resourceful Philip was, he couldn't obtain aristocrats like he obtained orphans. If there was a daughter left behind by the late Duke, he would have looked after her to make sure she bore an offspring for young master Damian in the future but unfortunately, all females of the Taran blood were dead.

The discarded daughter who lived without Philip and the late Duke knowing gave birth to Damian and died, the girl being raised to be the future Duchess fell off her horse in an accident and died, the girl in the womb of the newly taken Duchess of the late Duke was killed along with her mother, by the hands of young master Hugo.

The birth of young master Damian was by Heaven's aid. However, if young master Damian did not have a bride, the Taran bloodline would end. Without the Duke's cooperation, the path to securing a bride was far-off.

But. Without him (Philip) putting any effort, someone that met all the needed conditions became the Duchess. To confirm this, he had lied to Anna that it needed special conditions.

It was perfect. It was definitely a miracle. The heavens were still watching over the existence of the Taran bloodline.

'A beautiful bride will be born for you soon, Young Master Damian.'

In the darkness, a dark smile spread across his lips. Philip was already considering several variables, and various plans were being made in his head.

The long-cherished wish of his family passed down for generations. The persistent obsession that was asleep in his blood for a while was ignited once more.

# Chapter 52

## Part 1

*TN: Vision = secret manual.*

It was now routine for Lucia to take the medicine Anna prepared for her every other day. The maid usually brought it one or two hours after she'd had dinner. Lucia habitually brought the bowl of medicine to her mouth but was surprised and reflexively took it away from her mouth.

“...Vanilla scent?”

She brought the bowl closer to her nose again and took in the smell. There was no doubt. It was scent of vanilla. It was the cure that she couldn't find in her dream even after putting a lot of effort and time. The wandering doctor she'd miraculously met called it his family's vision. It was not a medicine that could be found so easily. Lucia called the maid and asked for Anna to be brought to her.

“Anna, today's medication is different from before.”

“Yes, it's a new remedy.”

“Is it a method you found?”

“...Yes.”

If Anna replied that she'd received someone else's advice, Lucia would've thought that Anna may've met the doctor from her dream. But she couldn't believe that Anna found it.

“Anna, I've studied medicinal herbs for a while because I was interested in them.”

After saying so, Lucia went on to list three different herbs. These herbs all belonged to the side of medicinal herbs with strong composition so they were herbs that should be examined and carefully prescribed according to the constitution of the patient. For

a doctor, this knowledge was close to common sense.

“Do you know what happens if you mix these three herbs together and eat it?”

Anna couldn’t grasp the intent behind this abrupt question but she answered truthfully based on her knowledge.

“Those medicinal herbs are herbs that should never be mixed together. Each is different in nature so when taken together, it will act as a poison.”

“Is that so? Then Anna, you brought this medicine to try and feed me poison.”

“What?”

Poison! Anna’s entire body grew rigid as she froze stone-cold. The petite woman in front of her suddenly seemed to change into an enormous steel wall. The Duchess wasn’t one to assert her authority or observe proper decorum with the people under her.

So, Anna had forgotten. She’d forgotten that the Duchess was a grand high-ranking noble that she would never be able to see in her lifetime if it wasn’t for her becoming the primary doctor.

‘Have I done something to offend the Duchess?’

A chill ran down her spine. The life of a doctor who was suspected for attempted poisoning was akin to the life of a candle flame before the wind. Whether it was true or not did not matter. The problem was such a suspicion being made in the first place.

“Did you know this medicine has a vanilla scent?” (Lucia)

“Yes, Milady.”

“Do you know why it has a vanilla scent?”

“...”

“If you mix the three herbs I mention earlier and boil it down, you get the scent of vanilla. You doesn’t seem to know this, Anna.”

“...What?”

“You said it’s a treatment method you found. How can you not know?”

After Lucia’s menstruation re-started because of the cure the wandering doctor gave her in her dream, she became interested in the cure itself. Whenever she went to buy medicinal herbs, she would remember the words telling her that certain herbs mixed together caused huge problems.

Philip’s lonesome expression as he tore the page from the note containing his family’s vision and gave it to her also kept coming to mind. In particular, she was curious about the medicine’s vanilla scent. So, out of curiosity, she began studying medicinal herbs.

Her studies did not measure up to that of a professional’s. She just learnt the type and efficacy of the medicinal herbs in the prescription Philip gave to her. She took the medicinal herbs on the prescription apart piece by piece and repeatedly tested mixtures. Through this, she found that the vanilla scent came from mixing the three herbs that were not commonly mixed together.

Anna’s complexion turned white. Anna did not know what kind of medicinal herbs went into the medicine. The medicine Philip handed over to her was in a finely ground state.

[The method of dosage is simple. It should be taken regularly, at least once a month till menstruation begins again.] (Philip)

[I cannot have a patient take medicine that I don’t know what went into it. The prescription should be given along with the medicine.] (Anna)

[It is our family vision, I cannot reveal this.]

[Philip. I do not doubt your conscience or ability as a doctor. However, this is not any ordinary patient]

[Anna, if that is so, I can personally explain to the patient.]

[That cannot be done. Sir Philip is prohibited from approaching the Madam.]

Anna had been very excited to learn there was a treatment method but while she waited for Philip to make the medicine, a forgotten matter rose to the forefront of her

mind.

In the past, the butler had said that even if they found cure, it had to be called Anna's. Even a simple mention of Philip's existence was not to be made in front of the madam.

[I will not ask what the circumstances are but I cannot let you meet Milady, Philip.]

[...I can stake my neck to assure you. If you are really worried, you can eat some to test it. This medicine that has no effect when a normal person takes it.]

[You said it has to be administered long term. A problem could occur when taken long term.]

[Anna, do you think I will make a drug that will harm a patient?]

Anna's trust for Philip, her conscience as a doctor and her desire for a cure were in fierce conflict inside her mind. She personally took the medicine for a week and watched over her body's condition for anything odd. While doing this, she received a summon from the Duke.

The Duke of Taran usually called Anna about once a week to ask her how the Duchess's treatment was going. And Anna's answer was usually the same.

[I'm looking for a cure.]

The Duke wouldn't question it more and with an answer of 'Okay', the discussion was over.

However, this time when she was summoned by the Duke, she felt pressured because she was in possession of the cure.

She felt a sense of shame that even though she was being paid a huge sum of money, she wasn't doing her work properly.

And because Anna's trust in Philip already occupied a huge spot in her heart, eventually, she brought the medicine to the Duchess.

'This... I did something crazy'

Only after Lucia questioned the components of the drug did Anna realize. She was a

doctor prescribing an uncertain drug to her patient. Before one considered that this patient was in fact, the Duchess, it was a fatal error in one's judgement as doctor.

"I have nothing to say. I am sorry, Milady. Truthfully, It is not my cure. I took the medicine for a week to verify it."

Lucia sighed, feeling Anna's anguish and efforts through her words.

"To have consulted about my condition, it must be someone you have great trust in. Who is it?"

"I'm sorry, Milady. I cannot say who it is."

"Did the person who prescribed the medicine ask not to be revealed?"

When Lucia thought about it, the wandering doctor from her dream wasn't one to covet credit.

"..."

Since Anna wasn't allowed to speak of Philip's existence, she couldn't give an answer.

"I cannot take this medicine. I cannot trust it. Do you understand?" (Lucia)

"Yes, Milady. I committed a grave mistake."

"I know you did it because you wanted to treat me. But do not lie next time."

"Yes, Milady."

Lucia was once of the notion that if Anna found a cure, she would not reject it. At that time she was angry with Hugo and her attitude was 'I-don't-care-whatever-happens. But now that she realized why he didn't want a child, her mind changed.

He was not ready to be a father at all. If a child was born, it would be a tragedy for everyone involved as well as the new-born child. Lucia did not want to have a child that Hugo did not want. She wanted to have a child that received a lot of love from their father.

Hugo grew up without knowing love from his parents and Lucia spent her childhood

neglected by her father. They both experienced lack of normal families. Lucia thought that in order to complete themselves in what they lacked, they needed to perfectly understand each other.

'Not giving birth to a child could be the happier side.'

There was regret. She was in love with him. She wanted to have a child for the man she loved. But now wasn't the time.

When she thought back to her tiring life in her dream, it taught her about a lot of things. If not for the dream, she wouldn't have such huge patience nor would she have been able to see the distant future.

## Part 2

Following the Duchess' will, Anna informed Philip that his medicine was rejected. As Philip listened to her story, he couldn't conceal his surprise.

"So... she knows the herb mixture that gives the vanilla scent...?"

Philip muttered to himself repeatedly.

"Let me meet the Duchess. This is most definitely a cure."

"You know that can't happen. What did you do to be under surveillance?"

"It's a personal matter and has nothing to do with medicine. Do you plan on giving up on the Madam's treatment like this?"

Anna shook her head.

"For me, there's no other way. Just as you say, Sir Philip could meet Milady and directly explain it to her but the meeting itself is impossible." (Anna)

"Anna, I cannot give up on a patient in front of me."

"...Then, I will ask His Grace the Duke when he returns."

The Duke of Taran was currently not in Roam as he was inspecting the fief so Philip couldn't miss out on this opportunity. Once the Duke came back, he would never be left alone with the Duchess.

The Duke did not know the secret behind the mugwort but if the Duchess got pregnant after receiving Philip's prescription, the Duke would immediately see through Philip's manipulations and tricks. And the Duke would do everything within his power to stop the child from being born.

Therefore, the Duke must not know that Philip was involved in the Duchess' pregnancy. For that, Philip had to meet the Duchess. He was confident that once he met the Duchess, he could coax and persuade her.

"The will of the patient is priority. The most important thing is whether the patient

wants a child. Do you think his Grace the Duke wants a child from the Madam when he already has a child born out-of-wedlock as his heir? Nobles are cold-hearted. They are different from ordinary people like us. Succession and affection towards one's wife are thoroughly differentiated. The Madam must also want to child to look at in her old age. Don't you think it'll be a shame if the Madam is never able to embrace her own child?"

Philip calmly tried to persuade Anna. And Anna, whose heart leaned positively to Philip, was easily persuaded.

"Their relationship might be good now but... '

In the first place, noble relationships were like this. Whether male or female, they kept separate lovers and enjoyed themselves even when they were married. The only thing left was the child.

Anna thought the same way as the servants who gossiped that the Duchess was thinning because she had to enter an illegitimate son into the register as soon as she married in.

"I'll try and talk to Milady."

To Anna, it was for the Madam's sake.

◊ ◊ ◊

"Milady, the doctor that I talked about the other has requested to meet you."

"Is that so? That's fine with me."

"However, Milady. This doctor... actually, he's the Duke's doctor"

"The Duke's?"

"Yes. The butler called me some time ago and informed me so. I was told the Duke's doctor was being watched and should not be allowed to meet Milady nor should his existence be mentioned to Milady. I was told it was an order from His Grace the Duke."

Anna's expression and tone were resolute. Lucia's feelings of expectation towards seeing her benefactor began to subside.

“Then, you are committing a grave mistake right now. You are disobeying the order not to mention this to me.”

“I am aware and I will take responsibility. But Milady, the doctor said you can be definitely be cured. He wants to meet Milady and explain.”

“Responsibility? How will you take responsibility?”

“...I will resign from my position as doctor. I lack too much in many areas.”

“...”

Lucia studied Anna’s haggard expression. It was an expression that said the woman had a lot of worries on her mind.

“Anna, the matter of the medicine last time was so, and the matter this time, likewise. These things won’t happen if you kept to your duty.”

“I know I have acted out of line. I just want to treat Milady so Milady can have a lovely child.”

Lucia sighed. Anna wasn’t a bad person. On the contrary, it was rare to see someone with passion as pure as Anna’s. So Lucia liked Anna. However, she wasn’t one to be tactful with people.

“What is the name of the Duke’s doctor that wants to meet me?”

“...Sir. Philip.”

“Sir?”

“He is titled a baron.”

Could the wandering doctor Philip be the Duke’s doctor? For what reason would the titled doctor of a Duke wander around? The Philip she saw in her dream seemed used to the life of a wanderer. He wasn’t some traveler taking a short trip.

‘Could something have happened to the Duke of Taran at that time?’

In the later part of her life, Lucia lived enclosed from the world. She didn’t know what

was going on in the world much less hear news about the high society. It was the most tranquil time of her life in the dream but Lucia suddenly felt angry with herself in the dream. It would have been nice if she lived paying a bit more interest to things around her.

‘Why didn’t he(Hugo) want me to learn of the doctor?’

At most, the man was simply a primary doctor. If Hugo hated the sight of him, he could simple expel the man and never see him again. Why was he going through the complicated process of planting eyes around the doctor?

“This doctor of the Duke, has he worked for the Duke for very long?” (Lucia)

“I hear he’s been the Duke’s doctor in the household for many years.”

Once Lucia heard the words ‘household for many years’, she recalled something Hugo said.

[I can’t tell you everything. These are things I don’t want to reveal even when I die.]

“The secrets he wants to keep. This doctor... he knows them.’

It was just a feeling. However there was something she didn’t understand. If her guess was really true, the doctor would have already died in Hugo’s hands. The clues on her hands were too little to reach a further conjecture but one thing was certain.

He didn’t want her to meet the doctor. If she wanted to meet the doctor, the best chance would be now that Hugo was absent but her instincts were telling her not to meet the doctor without Hugo knowing.

“I won’t meet this doctor.” (Lucia)

Anna sighed ruefully.

“Anna, as a doctor and as someone of the Duke’s house, you have committed a great blunder. I can forgive the mistake you’ve made as a doctor however, I cannot do so for the mistake you’ve made disobeying the orders of His Grace the Duke. As for your resignation, I will accept it but not right now. We may be going up to the Capital soon so keep it with you until we go to the Capital.”

Lucia then called for Jerome.

“Jerome, today my doctor Anna told me that the Duke’s doctor wished to meet me. However, Jerome has previously cautioned me about this.”

For a moment, Jerome’s sharp gaze went to Anna solemnly standing at the side with her head lowered, then his gaze went back to his Madam.

“Yes, Milady. Master sent down the order.”

“If it is his order, then there is certainly a reason. I have no intention of meeting the Duke’s doctor. And as for this incident, I will personally inform him when he return.”

“Yes, Milady.”

“Anna wanted to offer her resignation but I refused. She will remain as my doctor until we go up to the capital. That is to say, there is no need to interrogate Anna additionally.”

“Yes, Milady.”

Jerome’s attitude was akin to a solemn knight kneeling before his King to receive a command. Jerome always respected the Madam’s wise decisions. There was nothing lacking in the one that reliably held up the House of Taran.

Jerome was really glad to be of service to two respectable masters.

# Chapter 53

## Part 1

Following the Duchess' will, Anna informed Philip that his medicine was rejected. As Philip listened to her story, he couldn't conceal his surprise.

“So... she knows the herb mixture that gives the vanilla scent...?”

Philip muttered to himself repeatedly.

“Let me meet the Duchess. This is most definitely a cure.”

“You know that can't happen. What did you do to be under surveillance?”

“It's a personal matter and has nothing to do with medicine. Do you plan on giving up on the Madam's treatment like this?”

Anna shook her head.

“For me, there's no other way. Just as you say, Sir Philip could meet Milady and directly explain it to her but the meeting itself is impossible.” (Anna)

“Anna, I cannot give up on a patient in front of me.”

“...Then, I will ask His Grace the Duke when he returns.”

The Duke of Taran was currently not in Roam as he was inspecting the fief so Philip couldn't miss out on this opportunity. Once the Duke came back, he would never be left alone with the Duchess.

The Duke did not know the secret behind the mugwort but if the Duchess got pregnant after receiving Philip's prescription, the Duke would immediately see through Philip's manipulations and tricks. And the Duke would do everything within his power to stop the child from being born.

Therefore, the Duke must not know that Philip was involved in the Duchess' pregnancy. For that, Philip had to meet the Duchess. He was confident that once he met the Duchess, he could coax and persuade her.

"The will of the patient is priority. The most important thing is whether the patient wants a child. Do you think his Grace the Duke wants a child from the Madam when he already has a child born out-of-wedlock as his heir? Nobles are cold-hearted. They are different from ordinary people like us. Succession and affection towards one's wife are thoroughly differentiated. The Madam must also want to child to look at in her old age. Don't you think it'll be a shame if the Madam is never able to embrace her own child?"

Philip calmly tried to persuade Anna. And Anna, whose heart leaned positively to Philip, was easily persuaded.

"Their relationship might be good now but... '

In the first place, noble relationships were like this. Whether male or female, they kept separate lovers and enjoyed themselves even when they were married. The only thing left was the child.

Anna thought the same way as the servants who gossiped that the Duchess was thinning because she had to enter an illegitimate son into the register as soon as she married in.

"I'll try and talk to Milady."

To Anna, it was for the Madam's sake.

◇ ◇ ◇

"Milady, the doctor that I talked about the other has requested to meet you."

"Is that so? That's fine with me."

"However, Milady. This doctor... actually, he's the Duke's doctor"

"The Duke's?"

"Yes. The butler called me some time ago and informed me so. I was told the Duke's

doctor was being watched and should not be allowed to meet Milady nor should his existence be mentioned to Milady. I was told it was an order from His Grace the Duke."

Anna's expression and tone were resolute. Lucia's feelings of expectation towards seeing her benefactor began to subside.

"Then, you are committing a grave mistake right now. You are disobeying the order not to mention this to me."

"I am aware and I will take responsibility. But Milady, the doctor said you can be definitely be cured. He wants to meet Milady and explain."

"Responsibility? How will you take responsibility?"

"...I will resign from my position as doctor. I lack too much in many areas."

"..."

Lucia studied Anna's haggard expression. It was an expression that said the woman had a lot of worries on her mind.

"Anna, the matter of the medicine last time was so, and the matter this time, likewise. These things won't happen if you kept to your duty."

"I know I have acted out of line. I just want to treat Milady so Milady can have a lovely child."

Lucia sighed. Anna wasn't a bad person. On the contrary, it was rare to see someone with passion as pure as Anna's. So Lucia liked Anna. However, she wasn't one to be tactful with people.

"What is the name of the Duke's doctor that wants to meet me?"

"...Sir. Philip."

"Sir?"

"He is titled a baron."

Could the wandering doctor Philip be the Duke's doctor? For what reason would the

titled doctor of a Duke wander around? The Philip she saw in her dream seemed used to the life of a wanderer. He wasn't some traveler taking a short trip.

'Could something have happened to the Duke of Taran at that time?'

In the later part of her life, Lucia lived enclosed from the world. She didn't know what was going on in the world much less hear news about the high society. It was the most tranquil time of her life in the dream but Lucia suddenly felt angry with herself in the dream. It would have been nice if she lived paying a bit more interest to things around her.

'Why didn't he(Hugo) want me to learn of the doctor?'

At most, the man was simply a primary doctor. If Hugo hated the sight of him, he could simple expel the man and never see him again. Why was he going through the complicated process of planting eyes around the doctor?

"This doctor of the Duke, has he worked for the Duke for very long?" (Lucia)

"I hear he's been the Duke's doctor in the household for many years."

Once Lucia heard the words 'household for many years', she recalled something Hugo said.

[I can't tell you everything. These are things I don't want to reveal even when I die.]

'The secrets he wants to keep. This doctor... he knows them.'

It was just a feeling. However there was something she didn't understand. If her guess was really true, the doctor would have already died in Hugo's hands. The clues on her hands were too little to reach a further conjecture but one thing was certain.

He didn't want her to meet the doctor. If she wanted to meet the doctor, the best chance would be now that Hugo was absent but her instincts were telling her not to meet the doctor without Hugo knowing.

"I won't meet this doctor." (Lucia)

Anna sighed ruefully.

“Anna, as a doctor and as someone of the Duke’s house, you have committed a great blunder. I can forgive the mistake you’ve made as a doctor however, I cannot do so for the mistake you’ve made disobeying the orders of His Grace the Duke. As for your resignation, I will accept it but not right now. We may be going up to the Capital soon so keep it with you until we go to the Capital.”

Lucia then called for Jerome.

“Jerome, today my doctor Anna told me that the Duke’s doctor wished to meet me. However, Jerome has previously cautioned me about this.”

For a moment, Jerome’s sharp gaze went to Anna solemnly standing at the side with her head lowered, then his gaze went back to his Madam.

“Yes, Milady. Master sent down the order.”

“If it is his order, then there is certainly a reason. I have no intention of meeting the Duke’s doctor. And as for this incident, I will personally inform him when he return.”

“Yes, Milady.”

“Anna wanted to offer her resignation but I refused. She will remain as my doctor until we go up to the capital. That is to say, there is no need to interrogate Anna additionally.”

“Yes, Milady.”

Jerome’s attitude was akin to a solemn knight kneeling before his King to receive a command. Jerome always respected the Madam’s wise decisions. There was nothing lacking in the one that reliably held up the House of Taran.

Jerome was really glad to be of service to two respectable masters.

## Part 2

As soon as Jerome heard the meeting was dismissed, he went into the conference room. Hugo sat at the head of the table, looking through documents.

To those new to this, it was a tense atmosphere but to those who busying around their day, it was as always. They all knew that the Duke had the habit of looking through the content of the meetings for around 30 minutes after it was over.

“Your Grace.” (Jerome)

“Mm.”

Hugo responded with a lift of the hand, signaling that he didn’t want tea.

“Fabian is here.”

“Tell him to come here.”

A while later, Fabian came in and turned in his report. Hugo glanced at Fabian and acknowledged him with a nod then took the report. As he was looking through it, he frowned. Why was the Countess of Falcon suddenly approaching his wife’s acquaintance, the novelist?

“...What the hell is this?”

Fabian tensed up at the Duke’s fierce reaction.

“It hasn’t been just once or twice since you’ve come in, yet you only bring this now?”

Fabian swallowed hard. If he didn’t bring it now, he’d really be in big trouble.

“I apologize. It was a lapse in judgement.”

Knowing the nature of his lord, Fabian readily admitted his fault. Several times, he’d witnessed the scene of other people making numerous excuses and having something fly at their head.

Hugo continued reading the report and his expression grew more and more vicious.

The additional report included that the Countess of Falcon had done a background check on Princess Vivian.

Due to lack of time, it was still under investigation as to how the Countess of Falcon tracked down the relationship between the female novelist and Princess Vivian.

“A background check?”

Hearing the Duke’s tone laced with threat, Fabian broke out in cold sweat.

“Who is in charge of investments? Send him in.”

A while later, Ashin came in. Ashin wasn’t the person in charge to be exact but he was in a position to understand the flow of investments and bookkeeping so he came in on behalf of the person who was absent today.

“Have we invested in any high market or business owned by Count Falcon?”

Hugo remembered asking the person in charge to review a business plan passed to him by the Countess of Falcon. If the plan was judged to be profitable, the person in charge was responsible for deciding whether to invest. Normally, Hugo left matters concerning investments to the manager and unless there was a loss reported, he didn’t get involved.

Ashin quickly combed through the documents he brought in and found the related document.

“Withdraw all investments. Immediately.” (Hugo)

“Do you mean... right away? At least a month’s notice in advance...” (Ashin)

“Right. Now.”

Hugo cracked his knuckles in emphasis and Ashin straightened up.

“Yes, sir. I’ll deal with it right away.”

After Ashin left the room with careful steps, Hugo commanded the nervous Fabian.

“Send down this warning. If such nonsense is ever repeated, it’ll be one’s head next

time."

Withdrawing investments and even sending a threat. For the first time, Fabian found the Countess of Falcon slightly pitiful. The Taran Family invested on quite the huge scale so to suddenly lose such a large amount of money, Count Falcon's businesses would be shaken.

Still, to a woman he once shared intimacy with, it was truly ruthless. The Duke of Taran wasn't one to pursue an investment turnover unless a loss had been suffered so it was Fabian's first time seeing the Duke withdraw an investment for emotional reasons.

'Should I ingratiate myself to the Duchess a little?'

Fabian revised his thoughts that the Duke was just having fun and fascinated with being a newlywed. This wasn't just fascination, it was more like his lord had fallen for his wife.

◊ ◊ ◊

After dinner, Lucia asked Hugo to give her some of his time. They went to the receiving room and sat facing each other.

"When you were absent, I was told the Duke's doctor wanted to meet me." (Lucia)

Hugo's expression instantly froze over. He had definitely ordered that she was not to learn of the old man's very existence. This was the first time Jerome hadn't fulfilled his orders.

Feeling his master's gaze on him, Jerome lowered his head with a stiff expression.

"Don't be angry with him. My doctor is the one who disobeyed your orders. It seems my doctor met your doctor while looking for a cure all over and asked him for advice. I hear you called my doctor once a week to ask about the treatment so I think the pressure on her should have been considerable."

Lucia hadn't known he'd been calling Anna to ask about the treatment. She thought he had already forgotten about it and the fact that he'd been constantly asking about it made her feel thankful. But she could also understand how much of a mental burden it could have placed on Anna.

"Anna, my doctor, will be resigning. I hope you don't punish her additionally."

Lucia thought highly of Anna's efforts. The woman went beyond her role as a primary doctor and did her best to treat Lucia. She did all the work Lucia had done in the dream. She found Philip whom Lucia had miraculously met in the dream.

She met the Duke's doctor and after constantly interacting with him, she grasped his personality and medical skills before asking for advice, and then when she received the medicine, she personally tried it on herself. Hence, the cure was found as a result of Anna's efforts.

However, Anna was rash. It was fortunate that Lucia knew what medicine it was or else she would have taken a drug with unknown ingredients. It didn't matter whether the drug was the real cure or not.

Anna seemed unaware of how much of a mistake she'd made. If Jerome knew about this, he would definitely tell her husband and once her husband knew, Anna's life was forfeit.

Anna's arbitrary decision happened because of her heartfelt care so Lucia didn't want the woman to be charged of a crime to that extent and decided to keep the matter between herself and Anna alone.

"Alright." (Hugo)

"My doctor seemed confident that your doctor knows the cure." (Lucia)

"...I see."

Hugo acknowledged that the old man had remarkable medical skill. If it was the old man, it wasn't strange that he knew the cure.

"Could that fellow have used your doctor to try and meet you?" (Hugo)

Putting Philip's medical skill aside, Hugo couldn't believe the man himself.

"No. My doctor said she actively arranged for it. I was told your doctor didn't want to reveal himself until the end."

Anna put on the blame on herself as much as possible and covered for Philip. She

didn't want to implicate Philip who was already under surveillance and to Anna, Philip was a teacher close to her heart and a genuinely true person.

"Jerome."

Hugo made an eye gesture, signaling for Jerome to leave and Jerome bowed his head in response and exited the room.

"There is a reason I took action to prevent you from meeting my doctor"

The old man couldn't do anything to her nor was there any reason for him to harm her. What the old man obsessively desired from Hugo was a daughter; that is, a bride for Damian and she couldn't have a child of Taran blood.

Hugo was simply worried about what kind of nonsense the old man might say to her so he kept her away.

"Ah, yes. You wouldn't do it for no reason." (Lucia)

"If you want to meet him, it's okay if you do so while I'm there."

If the three of them met him together, the old man wouldn't be able to say stupid things. Hugo didn't want to see the old man again but if the man knew the cure, it couldn't be helped.

# Chapter 54

## Part 1

Hugo hated that she was sick. People opened their mouths left and right, telling him her condition wasn't normal. Like a parrot, the only thing the doctor Anna said was that she was looking for a cure. Indeed, the old man's medical skills seemed to be different from other people.

"I have no intention of meeting this doctor. Not only do you dislike the idea of me meeting him, you also don't want to either. Am I right?" (Lucia)

"...You're right."

"Could this doctor have harmed you in the past? Is there a reason to have someone you dislike so much around you?"

There were several complicated reasons as to why Hugo kept Philip alive. The biggest reason was that he owed him his brother's life.

"I owe him a life. My brother survived several times thanks to him."

Of course, there was a secondary reason. Philip knew all of the dirty laundry of the Taran Family. The existence of Philip made Hugo not forget the darkness he had inside. Until the day Philip died, Hugo had to live with the discomfort of his soles treading on sand.

Hugo put up with this as punishment towards himself and atonement towards his late brother. However, no matter the reason, if Philip was ever judged to be dangerous, Hugo would not hesitate to eliminate him.

However, for now, to him, the old man was nothing more than a mere doctor. When the old man opened his mouth, he was infuriating with his 'bloodline this' and 'bloodline that' but the old man was truly acting according to the will of the late Duke, and as his family had done for generations.

When it came to continuing the lineage, as long as Hugo didn't cooperate, that was the end of that. And as for meeting Damian, Hugo had completely blocked off that path. So in the end, the old man was just clinging to life.

“I see.” (Lucia)

Lucia's doubts were dispelled and she felt reassured. The benefactor from her dream was not a bad person.

“But you said he knows the cure.” (Hugo)

“Yes, but you do not trust this doctor. Will you able to trust him with my treatment?”

“...”

An old man who was nothing more than a mere doctor. Even though Hugo belittled Philip this way, he still felt somewhat uneasy. He wouldn't be relieved at all if he left his wife's treatment in the old man's hands. But Philip's medical skills were true. The old man wasn't one to say he could treat something when he couldn't.

“To be honest, I know the cure.” (Lucia)

“What?”

“Well, I missed the chance to tell you at first. And after that I was angry at you telling me to treat it at all costs so I didn't tell you. What I mean is, I don't need the doctor's help.”

“...”

Hugo felt both relieved and absurd. His feelings were complicated. The more he knew about her, the more mysterious she felt. His wife was mild and gentle. But at unexpected times, she broke off that mold and threw him off balance.

“I am not sick. I have no problem in my daily life and my health is fine. I can treat it at any time and not treating it is of my own will.”

“Is it because of me? Because I said I don't want a child...”

“I understand where you're coming from. So it's fine. We can take our time and think

it over. If you don't want to then I don't want to either. But I won't treat it without telling you first."

'But... your body isn't the problem.'

Hugo couldn't bring himself to tell her she couldn't have a child.

'If she knows, she might leave me.'

He felt like he was slowly sinking into a muddy pit with depths unknown.

'Why was I born with this body?'

Until now, he had thought it was fortunate that he couldn't leave a descendant behind. But now, he realized it was a curse. A curse that did not allow him to have a normal family with the woman he loved like other people could.

He recalled the face of his brother telling him that there was a woman he wanted to marry. If his brother knew his son was born, would be still be happy after learning the secrets behind his son's birth?

He would. If it was his brother, he would accept it and think only of the happiness in the future.

Rather, Hugo envied his brother. The guy fell in love without knowing it was his stepsister and died without knowing till the end. If he had to perform the sickening act of feeding his blood to someone else, Hugo didn't want a child. He felt like the moment he did that, he would really become a monster.

It was already too late to use this method with her anyways but even if he could, he didn't want to.

"You can do as you like." (Hugo)

Her treatment was completely out of his hands. Hugo couldn't tell her to treat it or not treat it. He didn't want to give her hope of getting pregnant by telling her to treat it, and he didn't want her to think he was against having children by telling her not to treat it.

"Come here."

Hugo spread his arms. Lucia gave a small laugh and stood up from the sofa to walk towards him. When she got within his reach, he pulled her into his embrace.

She fell onto his legs with a thump and Hugo wrapped his arms around her waist and nuzzled his head in her ample breasts.

“Anything else happen?” (Hugo)

“No. Ah... there was a letter from Damian.”

“...A letter comes every day.”

“It’s not every day. It’s once or twice a month.”

Once Damian became the topic of conversation, Lucia’s eyes began to twinkle. Hugo was still not pleased by her excessive attention to the boy. But as time passed, he became more understanding of their mother-son bond and was more forgiving.

“What did the boy say?”

“He said he’s doing well.”

Lucia began to bombard him with details of Damian’s Academy life that she’d read from the letter. Hugo chuckled as he remembered the report he received some time ago. It said that the boy wore the red scarf she sent him every day until the weather got warmer.

“You said that when you saw Damian for the first time, you felt like you were seeing me, right?”

“Yes. It felt like I was seeing you as a child.”

Her as a child. How would it feel to see a little child that was the very painting of her childhood? How would a child without evidence of his cursed blood, without black hair or red eyes, look? Hugo’s chest tightened.

He could give her an abundance of wealth and power but he couldn’t give her a child. What if this hurt her later on? What could he do if she implored him to have a child? Hugo felt as though he was wandering an eternal maze with no way to get out.

---

Translator's Corner:

\* Dirty laundry = dirty secrets.

## Part 2

“Anna, your employment contract has been terminated. You will be given a temporary employment contract for the time being.”

Jerome's tone had a certain edge to it. Anna replied weakly and looked through the document on the table one by one. She then signed a lifelong confidentiality agreement to keep the events from her time as doctor, secret.

“You have broken our trust. You will not be allowed to go out until your temporary employment is over and your contact will be limited to a minimal amount of people. You are forbidden from meeting the doctor.”

“...Yes.”

“Even after your employment is over, you will be watched to see whom you meet with. This will continue until we are sure that you will adhere strictly to the contract of confidentiality you have signed. I suggest you do not act in any manner that would create doubts.”

Living under surveillance with no known end. Anna realized how much of a mistake she'd made. Until she came to the Ducal House, she had little to no experience with treating nobles. She had no idea of the rules of the noble world and the habits of those living in it.

When she lived under the Duke, no one dared to treat her carelessly. They were all amicable and a few of her superiors treated her with respect. But she didn't conduct herself cautiously as a noble's doctor and was complacent. She would probably find out later, just how much she had been treated with generosity and humanely.

“If possible, can I meet Sir Philip one last time? He has taught me a lot. I would like to give him my last greetings.”

“I will ask Master.”

◊ ◊ ◊

Philip knew something had gone wrong when Anna didn't contact him for a day, and when she didn't find him till the Duke returned, he knew it had completely gone astray.

When one looked at the Duchess' current situation, one could assume that the Duchess would be desperate for a child. Hence, Philip thought that if the Duchess knew there was a cure, she would jump at the opportunity.

He couldn't tell where things started to go wrong. Anna came to see him about ten days after the Duke returned, looking rather crest fallen.

"Milady refuses to meet you, Philip. By now, his Grace the Duke has probably heard of the situation and knows everything. Do not worry. I explained it well."

A failure. Philip had already guessed so but when it was confirmed, he became frustrated. How come? How could he stop here when his goal was right in front of him? However his face did not reveal any of his internal anxiety.

"Anna, you are going through such a hard time because of me."

"No. I was the one who was thoughtless. Sir Philip and I cannot meet anymore. I will also be quitting my post very soon."

"Oh? Then Anna is receiving all the punishment from this. I feel bad, this happened because of me."

"This is the worst."

To think Anna would be resigning as from her post as doctor. This meant his access to the Duke would be completely gone.

"It is a position more than I deserved. Everything is going back as it was."

"When you talked to the Madam, you should not have said that I was the Duke's doctor. If his Grace the Duke says not to meet, the Duchess cannot readily agree to do so."

"In any case, one cannot meet you and avoid the eyes watching you."

"Well, that is true."

Philip appeared outwardly convinced but inwardly he clicked his tongue. What an inflexible woman. Because there were eyes on him, the best chance was when the Duke of Taran was absent. If the Duchess was firmly decided on seeing Philip, no one other than the Duke of Taran had the authority to stop it.

Of course, the Duke would hear of it later but if it means that he could talk to the Duchess, Philip would do whatever he could.

“So, what do plan to do after quitting? If you quit, it’s a great loss of talent, even for the Ducal House.” (Philip)

“Talent you say. I couldn’t find a cure for Milady and did nothing but prescribe headache medicine once or twice a month. On the contrary, I was over compensated.”

“...Headache?”

Philip’s eyes lit up momentarily.

“Migraines, it’s a common symptom among women.”

“Ah yes. It is a common symptom among women indeed.”

A touch of madness appeared in Philip’s eyes but disappeared as fast as it came. Anna didn’t discover anything.

“I know a very good prescription for headache. Perhaps you can call it compensation but I give it as a gift. The effect is really good.” (Philip)

“Isn’t that also part of your family’s vision? Such a precious thing...”

“I have no intention of making a living through medicine but Anna cannot live like me. If a good medicine can be of use to many people then it’s a good thing.”

“Ah. Philip. Thank you so much. Even till the end, you take care of me.”

“The prescription will be sent down in a few days. This time, the prescription will have all the herbs listed so you don’t have to worry about that part.”

After Anna left, a small smile spread across Philip’s lips as he mumbled to himself.

“Well then, shall I make a headache medicine?”

Never losing sight of even the smallest chance. This was Philip’s way of life.

Philip never did anything that would cause people to be suspicious of him. If he

seemed even the slightest bit dangerous, the Duke of Taran would not have spared his life. The Philip that the Taran Duke knew was merely a stubborn and foolish old doctor.

The allied relationship between the Taran family and Philip's family was a relationship at knife's-edge. So the method of survival Philip chose was to lower himself.

Without Philip's family, the Taran bloodline could not continue but Philip never tried to use that fact. The alliance between the two families could only last in the past because their interests aligned.

For generations, many lunatics headed the Taran family. Most seemed fine on the outside but inwardly they had a few screws lose. The late Duke was also something else. The only way Philip survived was by humoring the late Duke's feelings. Compared to the late Duke, the current Taran Duke's nature was rather clean.

The medicine to neutralize the mugwort's efficacy was a final product made through repeated experiments filled with trial and error. The small treatments used before the final result were all written down in the notebook passed down from generation to generation.

'Since the Duchess knows the vanilla scent... it has to be removed.'

Of course, the efficacy would fall. It would also take twice as much to neutralize the mugwort's efficacy in one to three years and the possibility of pregnancy would also fall significantly. The rest was up to the heavens.

However, the heavens had never betrayed Philip before. It wasn't a lie to say he knew a very effective medicine for headache. There was certainly such a medicine in his family's vision.

All he had to do was make a new drug by mixing the prescription of the headache medicine and that of the neutralizing medicine. It may take some time but his talent in medicine was acknowledged by even his late father who was stingy with praise.

◊ ◊ ◊

Sometime later, Anna got her hands on the prescription for the headache medicine. Philip left Roam not long after she received it. As always, the eyes watching Philip followed him till he had left the city of Roam completely, then they withdrew their

surveillance.

Anna looked at the prescription in wonder.

“So one could combine herbs this way. How revolutionary.”

She tested it on herself when she got a headache and the effect went beyond expectations.

Usually when one took medicine for headache, the heavy feeling in one’s head would continue for a short while but when she took this medicine, her head felt light and clear, like waking up in the morning after a refreshing sleep.

Anna began prescribing this medicine to the women of the castle that complained of headaches and their reactions were no different from Anna’s. Sometimes the women that suffered from frequent migraines would flock to Anna to ask for a month’s worth of medicine.

When Lucia called Anna in for a headache, Anna brought in the new drug.

“Anna, the medicine this time works really well.”

As Lucia’s periodic migraines tended to increase her irritability, Lucia truly admired the quick calming effect of the medicine.

“If you like it, I can make a sufficient amount before I leave.”

“I’d appreciate that.”

# 【TO THE CAPITAL】

# Chapter 55

## Part 1

Spring passed and summer arrived. It was the second summer to greet Lucia in her stay at Roam.

Day to day was peaceful and calm. Yesterday was like today, and today led to a tomorrow-like-today.

In this summer, the heat was in full swing and while they were having dinner at the end of a peaceful day, Hugo began to speak.

“His Majesty has passed away. Prepare to go up to the Capital.”

Lucia involuntarily dropped the fork in her hand. She had completely forgotten.

‘No. I might have subconsciously wanted to forget.’

Deep inside, she might have desired to shove everything away and live in this bubble, no matter what happened in the world.

“Are you okay?”

“...Yes. I was a little surprised. Since it was so sudden.”

Lucia was not surprised at the death of her father. The paused hand of the clock had begun to rotate again. From now on, the hectic future she saw in her dream would begin to unfold. Lucia didn’t know that she would dread it this much.

The Queen was incapable of having children. In other words, all of the King’s children were illegitimate. Hence, no one could argue legitimacy and anyone could become the Crowned Prince.

The King had as many as twenty sons but when the King passed away, only five of these princes were alive, including the Crown prince. In contrast to this, the King’s

twenty-six princesses were mostly alive.

The princesses were able to survive as they had no rights to the throne but on the other hand, the princes had to kill each other to get closer to the throne. While Lucia led a calm life in her small detached palace, a bloody battle raged in the courts.

In the midst of this, the Crowned Prince admirably emerged as victor but even so, he couldn't completely overpower the other competitors. In order to keep them in check, the Crown Prince needed to strengthen his forces and for that, he needed the Duke of Taran.

The final winner was the Crown Prince. And at his vanguard, the Duke of Taran.

Lucia didn't know the details of the complicated political struggle but she could guess that Hugo would be getting very busy in the future. He was definitely not idle in the fief but what he had to deal with was relatively simple.

He had meetings, monitored the territory and went on inspections from time to time. The people he met were limited and his actions could be predicted to an extent.

Unlike what Lucia prepared herself for, he had been a faithful husband. Perhaps the northern customs and manners had influenced him. The customs of the northern people differed from that of the Capital's in many ways.

The liberal tendencies of unmarried men and women were the same but in the north, one was mostly faithful to one's spouse after marriage. However, there were many things that would tempt him if he went up to the Capital.

Xenon was a country with liberal sexual customs. In particular, the Capital was the most open. Even after one was married, there was no obstruction.

Regardless of the fact that he was a married man, the capital was overflowing with girls ready to throw themselves at him. Lucia felt uneasy. There were too many variables in the Capital.

'He might grow cold if we go up to the Capital. There are so many beautiful women...'

"...it. Are you listening?"

"Huh?"

Lucia was startled out of her wits and dropped the knife in her hand this time.

“Are you really okay?”

“Ah... yes. I’m sorry. I was thinking about something else...”

“Something else?”

“Ah... the suddenness. I was wondering if Majesty’s health was not as good as it used to be.”

“I heard it was not usually good. Against the advice of the court, he didn’t refrain from excessive carnal pleasures and alcoholism.”

This was her first time getting an insight into the personality of the King. She felt embarrassed, as if her dirty linen was being exposed to her husband. Her father brought death upon himself with his debauchery.

Just like in the dream, Lucia’s relationship with her father did not improve at all but she felt no regret.

“When will you be going?” (Lucia)

“I plan to leave first thing at dawn. I have to hurry, so I cannot go with you. Be careful on the way, my wife.”

“Alright. I will leave as soon as I’m ready.”

When they finished dinner, Hugo took her hand and they walked out of the dining room. The servants were momentarily dazed because their eyes were trained on their masters but afterwards they outright ignored it. The servants had grown accustomed to the generous skinship of the ducal couple so, if it was to this extent they didn’t give it another glance.

Lucia suddenly felt somewhat embarrassed. She thought they were going to the garden but he took her to the terrace and hugged her tightly. She returned the hug, wrapping her arms around his back.

“Hugh? Why all of a sudden...”

“You don’t like this in front of the servants.”

“...”

If he knew she didn’t like it, it would be better if he didn’t grab her hand without notice or kiss her cheek where people could see.

The nice feeling of hugging him was short-lived. It was summer after all.

“It’s hot.”

Hugo sighed and released her.

“Can’t you just endure a little longer without screaming, ‘it’s hot’?”

“But it is hot.”

“What a cool-headed woman.”

He grumbled and she burst out laughing. He watched her with a gentle gaze then pulled her by the waist and kissed her on the cheek.

“Why were you so distracted during dinner? Is something wrong?”

“No, just... felt a little complicated. Thinking of leaving this place made me sad.”

“Do you want to stay back instead?”

His words were very tempting. If she really could, it would be nice.

“Don’t be ridiculous. There are so many things you have to do when you get to the capital. You said you asked His Highness, the Crown Prince to help with Damian’s matter.”

“You sound like you’re saying I should go and work because of the boy.”

“It’s only natural for a father to do something for his son.”

“Will the boy even know of my troubles later?”

“Of course. Damian is not an ignorant child.”

‘Even so, the boy is still chasing you all over the place’, Hugo muttered to himself. These days, Hugo had been curious about the contents of Damian’s letters and when he finally took one to read, the contents made his lips twitch. It was a basically report on everything that had occurred from morning till night.

“Is all well with Damian?” (Lucia)

“He keeps you updated, doesn’t he?”

“There must be some news you’ve gotten lately.”

Just as before, Damian lived in the Academy without revealing his identity. ‘Shita’ was not a position anyone could get with just skills alone. A good background was also needed. However, there was still a lot of time so Hugo was just watching the situation unfold. He had no intention of interfering in a matter of accommodation.

Boys had to be brought up powerfully. Perhaps because Damian was young, with uncertain status, outstanding skill and an unfriendly personality, there were many greedy people around him. There were also troublemakers looking for fights and these would only increase as the boy grew older. The boy had to capable of dealing with all of this.

“He’s doing well, of course.”

A few days ago, some troublemakers picked a fight with Damian. There were many opponents so a few blows were exchanged but that wasn’t the problem as far as Hugo was concerned. Nothing was broken nor was he crippled.

‘No matter how many opponents, to be hit by such lousy kids is just...’

Hugo was unsatisfied. Sure enough, Damian was his brother’s son. If it was him, he would have gotten rid of those fools without anyone knowing. When he told Damian, ‘don’t kill people at the Academy’, he meant ‘it is troublesome to take care of, so deal with it inconspicuously’. The boy didn’t seem to have understood him properly.

“Enough about the boy, be careful on your way. And be careful of the heat while you’re in the carriage.”

"There are many people to take care of me so why worry."

Lucia leaned her head on his wide chest. As time went by, his affection grew more romantic. She could guess that he liked her to a considerable degree. But despite that, her uneasiness did not decrease.

The capital was filled with his past lovers, seductive beauties that fell for his charm, and even the woman that was his wife in the dream. There was no room for her feet(1).

'I'm afraid you'll leave me.'

Lucia had thought that it would be fine as long as she loved him. She had thought that she could stand in the center and love without reliance or burden. But now, she could only wonder if such a love exists.

She was gradually waking up to her arrogance. Perhaps it might exist somewhere but such a love was impossible for her.

## Part 2

Lucia sat in the study reading a book then she closed the book and stood up. She could no longer endure the stabbing pain in her stomach. For a while now, she had been feeling stifled.

Even during dinner, it was hard for food to go down her throat. In any case, her stomach seemed to be disagreeing with her so she called for a maid.

“Bring me medicine for indigestion.”

Digestion medicine was a household medicine so there was no need to go out of the way to call a doctor. However, even after taking the medicine for indigestion, she still felt nauseous. After writhing in pain and finally throwing up, she felt much better.

“Milady, are you okay?”

“Yes. I feel much better after emptying my stomach.”

Hugo was busy preparing to leave on the morrow so Lucia sent word that she would be sleeping first. There was a lot to prepare and pack up for tomorrow so she decided to go to bed early.

◊ ◊ ◊

Hugo left his office when it was almost midnight. As he was suddenly going up to the capital, he had to a lot to work to finish up. There was no end to his work but since he had to ride to the capital at daybreak, he had to get some sleep.

‘Why did he have to die in a summer like this?’

What was worse than the hot weather was his worry that a long carriage journey in this hot weather could ruin her health.

‘Couldn’t he have lived one more year before dying? That old fool. He should have thought of his health and played in moderation.’

It was a shameful death that made people speechless. Dying in the summer and now of all times. Hugo could only feel dissatisfied. To some extent, Hugo was beginning to

settle into life in the north.

Once he went up to the Capital, he didn't know when he would be able to focus on the north again. If he just let things be, he would end up with idiots that try to do the exact same thing like the idiots he killed last time.

Well, it was good either ways. If that happened, he could just kill them too. His worry was more on the variables that would appear once he went up to the capital.

He wouldn't be able to keep his wife within his fences anymore. The mere thought of rogues approaching her made his head hurt. He hadn't gotten her heart or even her childhood name yet.

He quickly finished his distracted bath and went into her bedroom as usual. He saw her figure lying on the bed and moved to lie down next to her. He was about to take her into his arms when he heard a feeble moan. It was a small sound of distress.

He sprang to his feet and turned on the lights in the room.

“Vivian?”

He raised up the thin blanket and turned her body over to face him. Her body felt hot to the touch. He placed a palm on her forehead and felt her forehead clammy with sweat and her body burning with a fever. He immediately pulled on the rope to call the maid.

“Vivian.”

He called her name several times and patted her cheek lightly but there was no response at all. Flustered, he lifted her from her waist and took her into his arms. Feeling her body sink down powerlessly, Hugo was filled with terror.

“Vivian!”

Feeling the maid come in, Hugo didn't bother to look and just yelled frantically.

“Call the doctor!”

“Yes... Yes!”

The maid took off in a hurry. Those deeply asleep in the castle were rudely awakened by the fiery tempo.

Hugo placed the cold towel on her forehead and the maid responsible for waiting on the Duchess sat on her knees beneath the bed. Hugo interrogated the maid and the maid explained the condition of the madam from around dinner with all her might.

“After dinner, Milady threw up everything and said she would be going to sleeping early.”

“You should have called a doctor then. Is this how you serve your madam?”

“I-I am sorry.”

The Duke’s fierce rebuke and frigid tone chilled the maid to the bones. The maid’s voice trembled pitifully. It wasn’t just her voice but her entire body was trembling.

Anna, who had run all the way from her bed, came into the bedroom. She immediately got down the symptoms from the maid.

“Milady has to regain consciousness before she can take medicine. One has to wipe her down with a towel to bring down the fever.”

“She was fine until after dinner.” (Hugo)

“It seems to be acute indigestion.” (Anna)

“If it’s indigestion, why this sort of fever?”

“Indigestion can cause body ache as well as high fever.”

Anna turned to the maid.

“Did Milady complain of a headache?”

“A headache...? No, she did not.” (Maid)

“Does indigestion cause headaches too?” (Hugo)

“Milady has frequent migraines so I’m just confirming.”

“...Migraines?”

In an instant, the atmosphere turned prickly. Anna flinched.

“What do you mean frequent? How often?”

“...About once or twice a month. Milady was given medicine whenever she suffered from migraines.”

“This is new to me. Why don’t I know about this?”

“Milady said there was no need to inform Your Grace as it is a common ailment suffered by many.”

“When did this symptom start?”

“Milady said she often had headaches since she was a child. You don’t have to worry too much, Your Grace. Migraine is a common condition and Milady’s migraines are not on the harsher side.”

Anna’s explanation did not do much to change the atmosphere. The Duke’s silence was frightening.

Around when Anna began to break out in cold sweat, maids came in with a large pail of water and dozens of towels.

“All of you withdraw. I’ll do it myself.” (Hugo)

Hugo lay Lucia down on the bed and removed her nightwear. He dipped the towel in water, squeezed then proceeded to carefully wipe down her sweat-filled body. Her entire body was feverish and the every part he touched felt hot enough to burn.

‘How did you get such a high fever?’

Hugo knew that the prolonged state of unconsciousness while burning with a high fever was dangerous.

‘Migraines, huh?’

According to the doctor, it was a common symptom and nothing to be worried about.

But Hugo was angry that he didn't know about this 'nothing to be worried about' symptom.

Every time this happened, Hugo felt like there was an unbreakable wall between them. He hoped that one day, she would open her heart to him but waiting for that day was tedious.

He suppressed his irritation and anxiousness and continued to change the towels to cool down her body.

# Chapter 56

## Part 1

‘Refreshing...’

Lucia felt as though she was trapped in a burning fire and couldn’t breathe then a careful touch began to sweep over her body and little by little, she was able to breathe again.

Gradually, her consciousness returned and she slowly opened her eyes. She could see him in front of her, but she couldn’t tell if it was a dream or reality.

“Vivian.”

He called her name, a sense of urgency in his voice.

“...Hugh.”

When she heard his voice, she suddenly felt emotional. She reached out as though to grab him.

“Haa...”

Hugo gave a huge sigh of relief. He lifted the thin blanket to cover her body then he took her hand and kissed the back of her hand.

He gathered her sweat dampened hair, brushing it aside, then he wiped down her forehead with a towel. Seeing his eyes filled with worry, Lucia felt sick to her stomach.

It wasn’t just because of the indigestion. Ever since her mother died, this was the first time that someone was taking care of her when she was sick.

Tears welled up in her eyes and began to fall. Hugo’s expression hardened at this sight.

“Is anyone there! Where is the doctor!”

Seeing as he'd forgotten about using the rope to call and was screaming, Lucia squeezed his hand.

'It will be fine.'

For some reason, this thought crossed her mind. The thought that it would be fine even if they went to the Capital. It was a vague belief that this peace and happiness would not be broken.

"Hugh. If we go to the capital, will you be unfaithful?"

"...What?"

'She must really be in a lot of pain,' Hugo thought and at the same time, the realization that she didn't trust him at all made him feel powerless. In her mind, he was still far from reliable.

"I will never do that." (Hugo)

Lucia watched him quietly then gave a small laugh.

"Then it's fine."

'I'll trust you.'

Even if he got another woman, he wasn't one to deceive and hide in secret while cheating. He would rather say it out squarely.

'Afterall, he can't lie well.'

She had seen him embarrassed after he was thrown off his guard several times. When he gave orders to the servants, there was nothing stopping him from lying so she thought that lying was most likely his weak spot.

'But, in the capital's political struggle, lying is essential. Will he be okay?"

Hugo's cold mask only broke down in front of her. Lucia was worrying about something that didn't need worrying. She seemed to have already forgotten the Hugo from her dream and the Hugo from before their marriage.

‘What the heck does ‘then it’s fine’ mean? Fine? What’s fine?’

Hugo wanted to shake her and ask her what she was thinking about. Just then, Anna came in and while she exchanged questions and answers with Lucia about her symptoms, Hugo sorted out his complicated feelings.

Was she always so difficult? He really didn’t know. In the past, he used to think that once he gave women jewelry, everything would be solved. Until now, nothing had ever given him so much trouble.

“I will prescribe digestive medicine to calm your nausea. Once you take it and sleep well, you should be fine.”

While waiting for the medicine to be brought, Hugo continued to wipe off the sweat on her forehead. The high fever had still not reduced and her breathing was still uneven. Hugo couldn’t make a sick person talk for too long so he shoved his wandering thoughts away for the moment.

“Why are you so foolish? If you were sick, you should have called someone.”

“I thought it would be fine.”

“It could have been a disaster. You lost consciousness.”

“Is it dawn? What do we do? You have to leave early but you haven’t gotten much sleep.”

“That’s not the problem now.”

Hugo lowered his voice as much as possible and tried not to get angry at her. She had done nothing wrong to make him angry. It was merely his heart that felt sad.

“I hear you’re often sick.”

“I am?”

“The headaches.”

“Ah... that’s just a common thing.”

“Can’t it be cured completely?”

Lucic chuckled softly.

“When you say it like that, it sounds like a fatal illness. It’s not serious. It’s similar to someone who has frequent stomachaches. It can’t be helped.”

“Serious or not, I hate when you’re sick.”

“I’ll be careful not to fall sick.”

“That’s not what I mean... don’t hide it from me when you’re sick or in pain. As your husband, I deserve to know that much.”

“Okay, I won’t.”

The maid soon came in with the medicine. Hugo held her to his chest and fed her the medicine then helped her change into new set of dry clothing. Not long after taking the medicine, Lucia fell asleep. With that, it was assumed that the sudden turmoil of the night was over.

Before daybreak, Lucia’s temperature began to rise again. She threw everything up including the medicine and her temperature repeatedly rose up and down. Hugo stayed up all night trying to bring down her fever.

Hugo expressed his anger to Anna who was called for the second time.

“Didn’t you say it was indigestion? What is this! She can’t even keep the medicine down!”

If the northern nobles saw this, they would recall the rumor that the Duke of Taran turned into a flaming dragon when angry. Facing the Duke’s anger for the first time, Anna was so nervous that her fingers went numb.

She realized it was a blessing that only she and the Madam knew of her giving Sir. Philip’s remedy without knowing of the components. Anna instinctively felt that if the Duke knew, she would lose her head.

“I-I think Milady’s stomach is very upset. By any chance, has Milady been shocked or greatly surprised lately? If there are addition psychological factors, the indigestion can

worsen."

Hugo frowned and sank into thought. Apart from hearing of the King's death, there was nothing different from usual.

'So she was shocked at the King's death?'

Since Hugo had no affection for his father, he had overlooked the feelings that normal people would have towards the death of their parent.

She never really talked about her father but she talked about her mother frequently so Hugo was even forgetting that the King was her father. Still, they were flesh and blood so perhaps there were some unspoken feelings left over.

He wasn't being considerate when he passed on the news. Hugo felt angry at his lack of sensitivity.

◊ ◊ ◊

Lucia threw up everything she ate so she could only take in barely tea for two whole days then finally, on the third day, she was able to take in some watered down food. She ate half of her rice porridge, then she leaned back on the bed and closed her eyes.

'I must have been too worried about going up to the capital.'

It was her first time have such a terrible case of indigestion. She felt a cool hand on her forehead and opened her eyes. He was beside her.

"...The fever seems to have gone down a little now."

He pushed back his plans to go to the capital and stayed beside her the entire time so Lucia felt sorry, thankful, and worried that it might affect his work.

"I'm really okay now."

Hugo frowned slightly. The words 'I'm okay' seemed sewn to her mouth. She was sick so he didn't want to make her to feel uncomfortable. He took a deep breath and calmed himself.

"I heard you had a little porridge. Do you feel okay?"

“Yes, it seems to be digesting now. I don’t feel nauseous.”

“Are uncomfortable anywhere? You couldn’t eat well for a while, do you feel dizzy?”

“I won’t die if I don’t eat for a few days. My stomach was just a little upset.”

“It is not only fatal illnesses that are illnesses.”

Even when she was sick, she didn’t desire anything. Even though she was sick enough to throw up all she ate and her fever was high enough to scare him, she didn’t even say she was hurting.

Every time he saw her pale complexion, she would repeatedly ask him when he would be going up to the capital. And several times he wanted to reply with, ‘you’re really harsh’ but he swallowed down those words.

‘Do I really seem that unreliable?’

He felt anxious as he stayed by her side and watched over her.

“I think I have to go to the capital now.”

The urgency has now reached its limit. The Crown Prince had been sending letters but finally couldn’t contain himself and sent a messenger that arrived this morning. At least until the national funeral was over, Hugo had to be in the capital.

The fact that he had to leave while she was sick was very annoying but he couldn’t make the excuse that his wife was sick. To put in bluntly, she wasn’t terminally ill so he couldn’t make that excuse.

“I’m fine. You have to go, don’t you?”

Seeing her weak but pure smile, his chest felt numb. His wife didn’t give him any trouble at all. But he hoped that she would trouble him. If she held onto him and told him not to go, he would toss it all and stay by her side. His woman was lying sick in bed so who cared whether the king died.

“Get some rest. Don’t think about anything else. Take your medicine and don’t skip your meals.”

“Your nagging has increased.”

“If you don’t like it, don’t make me worry.”

Hugo bent down and kissed her head, her forehead and her dry lips.

“Vivian, are you really okay?”

Even though she reassured him several times, he remained, watching her with an anxious gaze, then finally, he turned around to leave.

As the door closed and the room grew quiet, Lucia felt her sight grow blurry and blinked. Her tears trailed down to the pillow. Perhaps because of her sickness, her hold on her emotions seemed to have weakened considerably.

She wanted to tell him not to go. She wanted to complain that she was sick and it was tough.

[Females sometimes fall apart when they lose the object of their affection.]

It was something Madam Michelle said some time ago. The Countess' words weren't wrong. If she relied on him without standing on her feet, she would completely collapse if he left.

To what extent was the proper distance Madam Michelle talked about? Lucia wished to know the exact answer to that question.

## Part 2

“Wow, it’s been hard to see your face.”

Hugo ignored the man expressing his welcome in an exaggerated manner and sat down. Kwiz didn’t mind the rudeness at all and just laughed cheerfully.

“Is your territory filled with honey? I didn’t think you’d really stay there for over a year.”

“Isn’t a lord taking care of his territory a good thing for Your Highness? No, is it ‘Your Majesty’ now?”

“It will be anyways but I haven’t been crowned yet. People are being nit picky over customs for that one.”

Kwiz shrugged his shoulders. He was currently acting as king and had full confidence in getting the throne. It was not possible to overturn the justification of the Crown Prince ascending to the throne.

Even with his brothers eyeing his position and watching for an opportunity, Kwiz was confident.

Kwiz looked at the dark-haired man sipping tea in front of him with an indifferent expression, and recalled the long time advice of his loyal assistant and tactician, Count Benef.

[He is a wild beast, Your Highness.]

The Count passed away from a disease in the past year, dealing Kwiz a huge loss.

[He is an untamed wild beast and can never be tamed. Do not try to confine him to us. A satisfied beast does not covet the deer before it. He will gladly stand by Your Highness’s side to oppose those that wish to confine him to a cage.]

[Are you saying not to expect his loyalty?]

[A stable alliance is a hundred times better than an uncertain loyalty. Remember that no royal has ever obtained the loyalty of the Taran Duke. The Duke of Taran will not

pounce unless provoked.]

[...So, you mean for me to show my back to a wild beast. Without fastening a leash.]

[He will tear those that come at Your Highness from behind to pieces. The House of Taran already has much to its name. Your Highness does not need to give more, it is enough to just acknowledge what it has in the first place.]

The late Hesse VIII was a King that entertained himself more than he dealt with official matters. Despite that, his reign was considerably long. What he did best was never touching the Duke of Taran and that alone said that Hesse the 8th was a wiser King than he was known for.

The Ducal House of Taran was a strange family. It wasn't clear when they began to exist but there was already a Taran Family when the nation was founded.

At that time, the House of Taran distinguished themselves greatly in the founding of Xenon and received royal treatment with a status of Grand Duke and had autonomy over a Grand Duchy.

They almost had formal rights to the throne. But against all expectations, they did not enter into politics.

In the reign of the second King who sought absolute royal authority, all Grand Dukes were stripped of their authority and relegated to Dukes. Their Grand Duchies, downgraded to fiefdoms.

The Grand Dukes at the time rebelled and walked down the path of familial extermination but if anything, because the Taran House obediently accepted their relegation, they were guaranteed rights to the throne.

Even then, the House of Taran was still not interested in politics. Many years passed, numerous families rose and fell repeatedly, and Hesse, the third King of Xenon came into power.

The House of Taran was still doing well and was the only Ducal House with rights to the throne.

As long as the royal family did not perish, it was nigh impossible to formally rank it, but the Dukes of Taran were treated almost like royalty.

All this while, the Ducal House of Taran did not ever interfere in politics but their presence was heavily revealed through war.

People began to say that Xenon exists because Taran exists. The Taran family was more strongly impressed in the minds of people than the Marquis family that produced the Queen or the Prime Minister. Yet, the Taran family never once challenged royal authority or expanded their territory.

Their territory was just as they got it when the nation was founded. The Taran territory was quite large but their borders faced one of the most troublesome tribal nations. Defending against the countless barbarian invasions was the Duke of Taran's role. In addition, when war broke out, the Duke of Taran stood at the front lines and took care of everything.

Some kings were afraid of the untold power of such a Taran Duke and acted hostile but after doing so, their later years weren't good. Hesse the 8th chose the path of acknowledging the Ducal House of Taran as it is and Kwiz was also of the same thought.

“How do you like the newly married life? Didn’t the Duchess feel stifled, stuck in the territory?”

Kwiz thought that if the new bride complained, the Duke would give in after a couple of pleas and come up to the capital.

He didn’t think the Duke would stay away for so long. With enough time, people began to wonder if the bond between the Crown Prince and the Duke of Taran was in peril.

Kwiz knew that the opposition was trying to approach the Duke of Taran and recruit him several times but he left it alone. The Duke of Taran was never someone that would dance in the direction of power.

It wasn’t because of some grand reason but because it was too annoying to do so. Even without that, the Taran House didn’t have any interest in politics.

“She likes quiet places so she did not.”

“How peculiar.”

They were both his sisters but were so different. Perhaps because their mothers were

different. Kwiz's blood sister, Katherine, was a party animal. She couldn't survive without dresses, jewelries and parties to show off at.

Since her standards were very high, she showed no intention of getting married and pretended not to hear when one said there would be no one to choose from when she got older.

In truth, no matter who she married, Kwiz was more worried about how the person that became her husband would be able to live together with such vanity.

*“Gong, do you want to marry one more time?” (Kwiz)*

His sister had set her mind on the Duke of Taran. Upon hearing that he had gotten married, the party animal, Katherine, stayed indoors for a week. Monogamy was the law for all but the Royal family, but, the Taran Duke had a way to be exempt from that.

Since he was a Duke, even if he wanted to take a second wife, no one would argue about the law with him. To Kwiz, it didn't really matter whether his sister was the main wife or the second wife. He had no complaint if she was marrying someone like the Duke of Taran.

*“Did you call me here to say this nonsense?”*

As a matter of fact, seeing Kwiz' face reminded Hugo of her condition and made him upset. He could still remember her asking him if he would cheat when he got to the capital.

The rumors of the capital were a lot of smoke without fire so Hugo couldn't help but worry that she might have heard a rumor that he didn't know about and misunderstood.

Kwiz's words were basically pouring water on boiling oil.

*“Just consider it. Even if you are officially married, you will likely get a few suggestions like the one I just made.”*

Hugo fixed Kwiz an intense gaze and Kwiz quickly took a step back.

*“I don't do anything that is of no worth to me.” (Hugo)*

“What? no worth? Three wives and three concubines is the dream of many men.”

“Then, Your Highness can fulfill and live that dream. As king, you can realize the dream to the fullest.”

Kwiz's expression turned awkward. The Duke of Taran was truly ambiguous in the sense that he seemed to like and dislike women. He was never free of women yet when it came to cutting them off, he was ruthless.

“About your successor. Do you really plan on it?” (Kwiz)

“I do.”

“No, you're married now. A child is going to be born in the future. Even if he's the eldest son, I mean.”

Isn't he an illegitimate child anyways? Kwiz swallowed the rest of that sentence. To avoid any clamor by supporting the illegitimate son of the Duke when he took over the title. This was the condition Kwiz was given to be able to bring the Taran Duke onto the political scene.

Having an illegitimate son take over the Duke's title was simple but also difficult. This was because it went against implicit social customs. However, Kwiz thought it was a very easy condition for obtaining the Duke of Taran. Kwiz himself wasn't legal per se either so he wasn't that narrow-minded about the issue.

However, in reality, when the Duke got married, Kwiz felt a little reluctant. Even if she was his half-sister whose face he had never seen, she was still his sister. The thought that his sister's child would be treated as a figurehead didn't really make him feel good.

“...Since when have you been so interested in my personal life? If that is all you have to say, I will excuse myself.” (Hugo)

“Ah, alright, alright. Really. Even after marriage, you're still so stiff.”

Kwiz was very interested in the Duke's personal life but at this point, he had to give up for now. Afterwards, they began to discuss the direction of the state affairs in earnest.

# Chapter 57

## Part 1

The discussion that followed was informal but with more crucial people joining, and looking at the faces of the people involved, it was almost like a cabinet meeting.

After the lengthy discussion was over, Hugo stood up and patted the shoulder of the eye-catching man that was standing at the side, and acting like he didn't know anything for a while now.

"You've worked hard."

The eye-catching man, Roy, grinned as if to say it was just so so. After Hugo left, Kwiz couldn't bear the sight of Roy that kept glancing at the door like a dog waiting for his master so he spoke.

"Sir Krotin, do you really have no interest of becoming my knight?"

"I do not."

At first, when the Duke of Taran said that he would place an escort knight at his side, Kwiz was a bit displeased that the Knight's former status was that of a commoner.

Moreover, it was one with no manners and unbelievably impudent. If it wasn't for the fact that Roy was a close associate and former guard of the Duke of Taran, Kwiz would have driven him away.

However, as time passed, his value was brought to light. In the past year, the amount of times that Kwiz's life was saved thanks to Sir Krotin was numerous. In front of Sir Krotin, assassins that tried to escape were caught like bugs and slaughtered.

Knowing of his tremendous skill, Kwiz tried to entice Krotin into being his knight at every turn but Krotin didn't even look like he was considering it.

"What is the reason? If you become my knight, you can receive more power and

remuneration that you receive now. You don't want that at all?"

"I don't really care for that."

"Then, what do you get from the Duke? Is it because you admire him as a Knight?"

"There's a more realistic reason. My Lord lets me duel."

"Duel? Isn't that something you can do anywhere?"

"Only with my Lord can I fight to the fullest without caring if my opponent gets hurt. I can't have such fun in another place."

"...I see."

Kwiz felt slightly fed up. Krotin was greatly skilled and no one among his knights could last more than a dozen rounds against him. Nevertheless, it was obvious that Krotin controlled his tempo and adjusted his strength to match his opponents.

This gave a great shock to Kwiz who always took pride in having the best knights around him. But soon, he acknowledged that it wasn't that his knights were weak, but that Krotin was terribly strong.

'Is Taran *Gong* that strong?'

Kwiz had personally seen the Duke of Taran wielding a sword on the battlefield numerous times. He knew it was great but since the battle was so lopsided, like a tiger in the midst of sheep, he couldn't exactly tell the extent of the Duke's skill.

'And now that I think about it, I haven't ever seen Taran *Gong* duel with someone since then.'

The only time the Duke of Taran lifted a sword was when he cut down his enemy. When one thought about it, it was quite dreadsome. Warriors liked to show off their strength but the Taran Duke didn't do so even though he was a knight.

Perhaps because of that, when Kwiz faced the sword-less Taran Duke, he sometimes forgot that the Duke was a knight.

"Who wins if you duel? Have you ever won by a stretch?" (Kwiz)

Roy rolled his eyes and burst into laughter. Those in attendance were now somewhat used to Roy's unconcerned and rude attitude in front of the prince so they didn't have any outward reaction.

"Winning? Who? Me? That's my goal in life. Although I don't know if it can ever be achieved."

"Are you saying you've never won before?"

"Honestly, my Lord doesn't go all out in our duels. Apparently, it's annoying. He says why should he exert himself for something he can't kill."

"..."

"Sometimes, my Lord doesn't even let me draw the sword. I have to be careful before brandishing the sword."

"...Why?"

"Because he might be in a bad mood. In that case, battle or what, I just get beat up."

"...Even with that treatment, you like it there?"

"It means I am one of the few people my lord trusts."

"Getting beat up?"

"That is the evidence of trust. My lord would rather just kill something than go through the hassle of beating it."

Kwiz had nothing more to say. Anyways, this was an unexpected harvest. The Taran Duke had a remarkably more foul nature than what was known.

◊ ◊ ◊

"Taran Gong!"

Hugo stopped walking and turned around. The owner of the voice calling him quickly approached his side.

“If you have some time, would you like to accompany me for a while?”

The young man with an amiable smile was Count David Ramis. When he came of age as the eldest son of Duke Ramis, he received a part of his father's estate along with the title of Count. He was also the Crown Prince's brother-in-law.

Once Kwiz sat on the throne, David was sure to rise to the center of power in the future.

David was the same age as Hugo. However, an enormous difference existed between them. Hugo was a Duke and head of his family while David was nothing but a successor to a Duke.

So David calling Hugo by ‘Taran *Gong*’ was a very rude act. To be able to call Hugo in that manner, one had to at least be a Duke. And if one were to quibble over it, even a Duke had to address Hugo with honorifics.

Even formally, the position of the Taran Duke was recipient to royal treatment. Hugo could see through David.

Outwardly the man smiled amiably but inwardly, he was full of rivalry.

Greenhorn. Hugo sneered inwardly but on the surface, his expression remained taciturn.

“I do not believe I will fit in.”

Hugo responded after briefly staring at David and his followers that were stuck to him like a tail. In any case, Hugo thought of Duke Ramis' face and treated them with adequate courtesy.

“Ha-ha. What are you talking about? I'm sure if *Gong* is with us, the occasion will shine even more.”

“I mean I'm concerned that only I will shine.”

There was no one that couldn't understand the meaning behind this sarcastic remark. David's eyes widened in embarrassment and his ears flushed red.

It was the first time he was turned down so blatantly. The people around David always tried to prove their loyalty to him because he was positioned to become the next Duke.

"Hahaha, just as I have heard you are an outspoken person. Will you oblige and share your valuable opinions with me?"

"Hear that from your father. If your father has nothing to say, come and find me."

The Duke of Taran suddenly spun around and began to walk away so David couldn't hold him back anymore. He clenched his fists at the humiliation and his followers sensing his mood, began to furtively scratch his back. (1)

"I have heard he was a knight but how rude."

"It would have been more harmful if he went to our meeting."

David smiled widely.

"Even if he is knight-born, he's an excellent individual. Hence why His Highness, the Crown Prince is so trusting of him." (David)

"Even so, can he be compared to Elder? Is not Elder the father of the future Queen of this nation? If one looks further, Sir will become the uncle of the one that rises to the throne of this nation."

David smiled, pleased at his follower's flattery.

'Indeed. No matter how arrogant one acts, one can't surpass my father. After all, we are tightly bound with His Highness by blood.'

Hugo didn't give a crap about David at all but David was burning with rivalry against the Duke of Taran. There were many nobles with higher status and authority than David. But they were all elders, well advanced in their years.

Therefore, there were no competitors around David's age except for the Duke of Taran. And even though the Duke of Taran was the same age as David, he was already a Duke. He gained a reputation by sweeping through the battlefield and was very famous for how the Crown Prince went through great lengths to acquire him.

Even his father praised the Duke of Taran to the skies. His father warned him several times that the Duke of Taran wore the skin of a bear but in reality was a fox and one should be careful with one's words and actions before him.

David replied in affirmation but scoffed inwardly. He was very unhappy that whenever the Duke of Taran appeared, everyone's attention shifted towards him. What was so great about him swinging a sword on the battlefield a few times?

If David had seen the Duke of Taran on the battlefield even once, he would not have had this thought but throughout last war, he was safely at the rear.

'No matter what, he is just an ignorant knight.'

David was brimming with groundless confidence.

## Part 2

After a few days, Lucia got off her sickbed and was good as new. She had been in bed for quite some time because of the indigestion, but there were no aftereffects.

As though a reward for the last few days of poor food, the table was full of high quality dishes for lunch as well as for dinner. They did not forget to be considerate and only gave her food that was easy to digest.

“Jerome, the number of maids has diminished a lot. There are faces I haven’t seen too.”

“Yes, Milady. The employment period has expired for many.”

The Duke ordered for the servants waiting on the Madam to be changed because their attitudes were bad. In any case, most of them were employed temporarily. They were initially to take all subsequent temporaries to the capital, but since such a situation occurred, the Duke just terminated all the contracts.

The plan was to find the whereabouts of the maids that worked in the residence in the capital and re-employ them. After which, he would leave one maid in charge of managing the Roam castle.

Even though the maids that waited on her for over a year were changed in a single morning, the madam simply replied with, ‘I see’, and said nothing more.

At first, Jerome thought she was an innocent and delicate person but over time his thoughts changed. It was rare for someone to deviate so greatly from his first impression but the Duchess was truly a mysterious person.

‘She’s truly strong.’

As soon as she got married, she was taken to her husband’s home where she didn’t know a single person so she was bound to be lonely and uneasy. If she looked for someone to rely on, it would usually be the maid who took care of her like her hands and feet.

When a maid was favored by the mistress of the house, a ranking forms among the maids. Discord among maids was like a drizzle that went unnoticed until one was drenched. At worst, it could even invade the authority of the butler so most noble

butlers were worried about such tiresome things happening.

The Duchess handled those working under her with a clear line. She ordered only what was necessary and did not bother with superfluous actions. Even if something was done wrong, she simply pointed it out and it was rare for her to raise her voice.

In that respect, the madam resembled the duke closely. The reason why servants found it hard to attend to the couple's needs even though they had never been disciplined before was because the servants weren't given any room for engagement.

'Is it because their marital harmony is good?'

It was very strange but no matter how Jerome thought about it, if the couple's relationship became estranged, the one to suffer the biggest blow would not be his mistress but his master. Jerome couldn't give an objective reason why, but it was an instinctive feeling.

"His Grace sent that you should recuperate well and come to the capital at the end of this month."

"What recuperation will takes that long? It's just indigestion. Everyone is making such a big deal out of this."

Jerome smiled ambiguously.

'Milady says so because you didn't see Master properly during your fever.'

Jerome was on edge in the receiving room when his master called the doctor and kicked up a storm. When Anna was called back at dawn and came out looking pale, Jerome's heart sank, thinking the Madam's illness was very serious.

When the Madam finally fell asleep and his master came out, one didn't know how much his master rebuked Anna for not treating the Madam properly. It was the first time Jerome saw his master expressing such extreme emotions. He truly felt pitiful for Anna who was shaken up. She would probably gain a handful of gray hair.

'I hope Milady continues to be beside Master this way. I am earnestly hoping and looking forward to it.'

Looking at Lucia relaxing in satisfaction as she drank tea, Jerome thought this way.

People didn't know much about the Taran family. Apart from the fact that it was a very famous knight family, nothing was known. In the north, the land was harsh, the population was small, and day in day out, war with the barbarians broke out on its borders.

It was indeed a land without room to spare for profits. This was a reason that no one coveted the vast land that was the Taran territory.

Of course, the Duke was wealthy. No matter how ungainly the land was, there was no way the owner of such a vast land could be poor.

Even though everyone acknowledged the financial and military power of the Taran Duke's family, no one looked beyond that. The Taran family was a family that had existed for a very long time.

They didn't thrive enough to stand out conspicuously but they weren't invisible. Their years of power could not be ignored. The Taran territory, the north, had been ruled by the Duke of Taran for quite the long time and in the north, the Taran family was like King.

Nobles saw the people's support as a trivial thing but at times the support could become a tremendous force. If the Duke of Taran took the lead, the northern people would all follow without complaints. Taran's military power was not the knights that belonged to the family but all of the northern people. Other nobles were unaware of this.

The north was calm. It was contradictory to say that the north which was always at war with the barbarians was calm but except from the war, the north was calm. Unlike other territories, in the north, there were no occasional uprisings.

One might think that the reason was because people were united to fight against the barbarians but the biggest reason was because they all had enough to make a living.

The Duke of Taran somehow managed to oversee the north better any other Duke. He did not take too much tax, exploit or suppress with power. Rewards and punishments were certain and no matter how noble, one couldn't harm another without reason. As long as one obeyed the law, nothing irrational would happen.

The northern people knew how good it was to live in the north. Even though the land was barren and one couldn't amass wealth from farming, one didn't have to starve.

Rather, because one wasn't well-off, one didn't fall into depravity.

The northern people all had integrity and stability and that was an enormous asset to the north. And the power that the Duke of Taran held was more than people could imagine.

For many years, the Taran family didn't have to drain their energy with the likes of succession struggles, and the power of the family that protected and maintained its title blossomed to a tremendous degree.

No one knew that the Duke of Taran had acquired a few gem mines from the barbarian lands after subjugating them, or that he owned several top giants actively operating in other countries, or that he had bought a great deal of land and islands in other countries.

Jerome thought that if the Duke of Taran made up his mind, it would be easy for him to overthrow this country. Overthrowing was one thing and setting up and running the country was another matter but anyways, the power that the Duke held was much more than people thought.

From the level Jerome could see as a steward of the house, he thought so. But the Duke had no attachment to family. The Duke led the family as though something was tying him down.

Rather than an obligation to perform his duties as a Duke, it was more like he was entangled in something sticky and wanted to break out but couldn't.

Once in a while, there were times when the indifferently cold Duke revealed his inner feelings but even then, he had an expression like he'd had enough.

But one didn't know since when, but Jerome hadn't seen that expression and he was certain that the reason was the Madam. If for any reason or in any form, his master lost the madam, what would happen?

Jerome was afraid to even imagine it.



The carriage left Roam and arrived in the Capital around ten days later. The time spent was double compared to when Lucia went from the Capital to Roam.

The fastest route was a wasteland with no shade so they couldn't go through it at midday with the blazing sun. And because she took advantage of the evening and early morning hours for some activity, the speed couldn't help but be slower.

This journey this time was also escorted by Knight Dean. The last journey, he escorted by order of the Duke but this time, he volunteered. Dean was a man with pure loyalty to the Madam but if it were a knight other than Dean, Hugo would have been uncomfortable.

Hugo had faith in his elite Knight's loyalty and in particular, he valued Dean and Roy greatly. He believed in Dean's prudence and sincerity just as he tolerated Roy's simple character and believed in his ability.

Returning after a year and some months, Lucia felt emotional as she looked at the Ducal Residence. It was from here on that her life began to change.

On the way back after the exchanging certificates in wedding ceremony, he said:

[If you want to remain in the Capital, you can.]

She really did well in not accepting the Duke's words and choosing to live apart from him. If she did that then the both of them would have remained as strangers forever.

'Although I'm no confident in being the perfect couple with him.'

But to some extent, she knew and understood him. At the very least, the phase of other people saying that they were only couples on the surface had passed.

As Lucia entered the mansion, she subconsciously wrapped her arms around herself. Cool air, distinctly different from the hot air outside, hit her skin.

Due to the house' excellent design with heat-dissipating features, Lucia's first impression of the house was that there was no warmth. At the time, she didn't know she would get married and stay there for a few days.

She was able to compare to it because she had stayed in Roam. The cold stone wall of Roam was much warmer than this. Even though it was steadily managed, she realized than indeed one had to live in a house for it to feel like home.

She felt sorry when she realized he'd been living alone in this cold, spacious house.

"Milady, your bedroom is opposite Master's bedroom just like in Roam. It is facing the hallway and the room you stayed in previously when you were here-."

"I will find it on my own. You must be busy, you can go see to things."

"Yes, Milady. And this might be needless words of concern, but please be sure to bring a maid with you when you step out of the house even if it is just to the yard. Unlike Roam, one cannot predict how many eyes are watching or what can happen in the Capital."

"Alright. I will be going up to get some sleep. When will he be coming in?"

"He is scheduled till evening so it seems he will be returning late."

It would have been nice to see him today, Lucia thought as she went up to the bedroom on the second floor.

# 【THE CAPITAL'S HIGH SOCIETY (1)】

# Chapter 58

## Part 1

It was a late evening gathering done to avoid people's gazes. Every single member in this secret gathering was an influential figure in society. Most likely, it would be very hard for this group of people to be able to gather in secret again.

Crown Prince Kwiz, Duke Taran, Duke Ramis, Marquis Philip and Marquis DeKhan. Excluding the Crown Prince, all four were *Gong* and if one were to add up all the territories they governed individually, they were high-ranking influential nobles that governed half of the country.

"So, what is Taran *Gong*'s view on this?"

Hugo thought about Kwiz's question for a moment and spoke.

"War will happen. It is just a matter of time. Therefore, the anti-forces certainly needs to be cleaned up."

"Mmm..."

They all hummed thoughtfully. There was no one here that didn't know that even though it was said the war had ended, it was closer to being a ceasefire.

The Southwest Allied Forces were defeated in the war and were paying dearly for it because they had to pay many reparations for the war.

Unable to bear the heavy tax, rebellions rose all over, civil wars broke out, some countries were overthrown and dynasties were changed. Except from war, there was no other way to escape their current predicament.

"I agree with Ramis *Gong*'s idea of leaving them to grow in strength for the time being."  
(Hugo)

"What is the problem with just dealing with them from the start?"

“Instead of snapping the branches, pull it out from the roots. If dealt with a half-measure, hidden enemies could emerge later, during the war.”

This was a place to discuss how to handle the so-called, anti-Imperial forces, which was basically the Crown Prince’s half-brothers.

Duke Taran and Duke Ramis were of the opinion to leave them for now and deal with them later but the two Marquis’ were of the opinion that it was cleaner to just clear them out now.

Both sides had reason to it so Kwiz was pondering it over.

“If Taran *Gong* is making the decision, would you leave it alone for now?”

“No. If I am making the decision, I will deal with it now.”

Hn? They all turned their gazes to Hugo, signaling they didn’t understand his meaning.

“Why have your words changed? I thought you wanted to pull it up from the roots and not handle it sloppily.”

“That is playing by the books but I am not Crown Prince. I can’t stand annoying things buzzing around me. It suits me more to start killing everything.”

“...Ah. Is that so.”

Kwiz suddenly remembered how the Duke of Taran handled the northern lords that betrayed him over a year ago. Close to 1,000 people died.

Even the King who tolerated and stayed out of northern affairs showed significant discomfort at the time. Even without knowing the details, there was no doubt that the previous King had received an enormous gift to block his mouth back then. After all, the incident had fizzled out as though nothing happened.

“If they crawl up later, one can just kill them again. Even if they are dealt with right now, I will not object. But I am confident to kill them all, disregarding the aftermath. Isn’t that what troubles Your Highness, Crown Prince?”

Kwiz looked disinclined. It seemed like complete understanding of the Taran Duke who thought of people’s lives like insects would forever be impossible. But whenever

this extremity surfaced, Kwiz felt strangely relieved.

This was because the Duke of Taran was not likely to act like a fox and scheme behind his back. But one cannot know everything.

Kwiz would not do something stupid like understanding someone with feelings alone. But when it came to understanding someone, it was inevitable to trust the image drawn in one's head instinctively.

“...Mm. For now, I will watch the situation unfold. What do the rest of you think?”  
(Kwiz)

Duke Ramis as well as the two Marquis' agreed. Duke Ramis turned to look at Duke Taran with a profound gaze. Perhaps he was growing senile but he sensed that the Duke of Taran had deliberately phrased it that way.

I am ignorant so I want to kill everything but what does Crown Prince think.

In that way, he naturally drove the Crown Prince's thoughts to the other side.

‘Hmmm...’

Unintentionally, Duke Ramis kept comparing his son and the Taran Duke. Probably because they were the same age. And every time his son lost. From the outset, the capability itself was different. It was really fortunate that the Duke of Taran did not hold much interest in political power.

Duke Ramis decided that he would give his son a firm warning again when he got home. He would tell him not try to compete with the Taran Duke out of pointless childishness.

His son, David, had a passably exceptional head on his shoulders but he was arrogant and haughty. He only received worship from young and did not know how scary the world could be.

If one pushed forward boldly, it could become an advantage but if one didn't know their place, it could become a huge problem.

Duke Ramis was now old enough to begin worrying about matters after his death. The Crown Prince, who would rise to the throne, was at his prime and so was the Duke of

Taran.

Under the reign of the new King, the ones that would guard the family were the children. So Duke Ramis' attention was focused on the issue of succession.

Kwiz did not resemble his predecessor. On the surface he seemed virtuous but his nature was a powerful. If one wanted to protect their family under a King that was sure to pursue strong royal authority, one had to know how to lower their head.

But in that regard, David made him uneasy. It would be fortunate if David didn't run himself against the wall thinking he was extraordinary.

‘Perhaps Robin might be better a option than David.’

Duke Ramis was beginning to consider his gentle second son, Robin as his successor, instead of the overly confident and prideful David.

And David was unable to even fathom that the Duke of Ramis could be having such a thought.

## Part 2

Hugo felt exhausted from attending a meeting he didn't lead. He could somewhat understand the troubles of his vassals and locals lords that attended his meetings.

His distant mansion submerged in the darkness looked exceptionally lonely today. Ever since coming to the capital, his steps grew heavy whenever he entered the mansion. To him, a house used to have no special meaning except for being a sleeping place.

But in the north, whenever he came back to Roam, there was always someone waiting for him and for the first time ever, he felt the feeling of going home.

Hugo heard that she had left for the Capital but because he told her to take it easy and not overdo it, it would take some time for them to arrive in the Capital. To be honest, he wanted her to arrive as soon as possible.

As he stepped out of the carriage, he was surprised by the sight of Jerome who greeted him.

“Have you been well, Your Grace?”

“When did you arrive?”

“I arrived this morning escorting Madam.”

“Did anything happen?”

“No incident occurred with Madam the entire journey. After arriving, she slept shortly during the day and retired to her bedroom a while ago.”

While listening absentmindedly, Hugo walked past Jerome and entered the mansion then quickly climbed up the stairs. He habitually opened the door to his bedroom and his heart jumped for a moment in view of the empty, chilly room. Nothing was there.

He opened the door to the dark bedroom on the opposite side of the hallway and the silhouette laying on the bed moved.

“Mm... are you just coming in?”

Hugo's heart throbbed as he listened to her sleep-filled voice. Could a song be sweeter than this on his ears? He quickly moved to the bed and abruptly pulled her into his arms. Then he buried his nose in her neck. He had really missed her scent and her soft body that sank into his arms. The sensation filled his lonely heart with joy.

Lucia felt as though the fatigue from the trip was flying away in his strong embrace. She leaned on his chest and enjoyed his embrace that she had longed for. They stayed in that position for a while, intoxicated with each other's warmth.

He grabbed her shoulders, moving her away from his chest and in a swift motion, he captured her lips. His hot tongue parted her lips and wove itself into her mouth. Their breath and saliva were instantly mixed and his lips vigorously devoured hers.

They separated for an instant then her lips were swallowed again. Lucia's senses were overwhelmed by the intense, sweet and imploring kiss. His hand slid into her thin nightwear, grabbing her bare breast. Her body, accustomed to his caresses, was thrilled by the stimulation and automatically flinched.

His large hand kneaded her breast and his fingers rubbed her nipple. Her body longed for his touch and was instantly aroused from his caresses. Because of the hot weather, her nightwear was somewhat transparent and light. So, his hand exploring on her nightwear could feel her figure in its entirety.

He placed his lip on her taut breast and pulled her nipple with his teeth.

“Huu...”

Her stimulated nipple grew stiff. He licked her nightwear covered nipple and ended his licks with a bite. The breast area of her nightwear was wet with saliva and stuck to her chest, looking erotic.

He fondled her breasts to his heart's contents and suddenly, the nightwear started to look irritating. He wanted to taste her sweet, soft skin. He grabbed the front of her nightwear and pulled it aside. The few top buttons of the nightwear were sent flying and the garment was ripped apart, unable to win against his strength.

He immediately sucked on her pale breast, now fully exposed to him.

“Hng!”

Her hands dug into his hair. When his tongue began to lap around her chest, a shiver ran down her spine. Her body surged with heat, readying to accept him. The inside of her legs grew hot and an anxious sensation traveled through her body. Her waist moved restlessly and her legs rubbed against each other.

His hand traced down to her thighs, pulling down her underwear. He stripped her underwear off her ankle and carelessly threw them aside. He didn't have the focus or patience to take off all his clothes.

He pulled down his pants, bringing out his hardened member then he grabbed her legs and spread them around his waist. His firm member reached her clandestine spring and he moved his waist a little, rubbing against her drenched entrance.

He lowered his head and whispered to her in a heavily subdued tone.

“Can I?”

She gave a small nod and the tip of his penis touching her entrance pushed in slightly and his length slowly entered her. It was a careful motion compared to his usual urgent movements. He clenched his teeth, suppressing his desire to thrust into her with intensity. He was worried that if he went in impatiently, his small, feeble wife would get hurt.

When he was completely inside her, their breaths that had stopped for a while simultaneously burst out. His huge thing fully occupied her small body, as though it originally existed there.

Lucia sighed with relish. The feeling of her insides being filled gave her a sense of satisfaction and pleasure. His member entered and throbbed inside her, widening the narrow walls of her vagina. The sensation of a foreign body pushing against her inner walls was vivid and Lucia knit her brows.

“Does it hurt?”

“Haa... N... No.”

“I’m going to... go a little stronger. Tell me if it hurts.”

Hugo put strength in his arms, holding back his desire to ravage her insides recklessly, and the veins of his arms bulged. He pulled out slowly then thrust in heavily. Her body

flinched as an achy tingling sensation traveled through her body. The dull ache was gone in a moment, and a weak sense of climax ran up her spine. Her body shuddered with pleasure.

Again, he slowly pulled out and with a heavier thrust, he penetrated deeper. Lucia moaned and grabbed his arm, squeezing the sleeve of his shirt. When he kissed and caressed her, her body grew sensitive and excited, as if to accept him, and at the same time, it contracted and tightened, as if to resist him.

“Hng...”

“Gh... Vivian... too... tight.”

Really. It's sucking me in. He muttered with rough breath. His penis pushed against her tender walls and entered deeper. Her insides were so tight and wet that every inch filled him with relish.

He held down the reins of his desire that wished to run wild. Not yet. Her body needed a little more preparation. He knew from experience. He had to make her wetter for the path to flow smoother.

He opened her body tenderly and slowly, with movements like a starving beast. She felt like a treasure being bathed with love. This feeling filled her with more excitement than any intense stimulation. She closed her legs around his waist and lifted her hips to accept him deeper. She felt breathless as she swallowed him all the way to the hilt.

He took rough breaths beside her ear and the two fully entwined bodies began to move together in rhythm. He increased his thrusting speed a little and his thing rubbed against her inner walls intensely.

“Ng... good...”

“...What?”

Hugo mumbled roughly and while moving waist, he nibbled on her ear. He moved to her neck and licked it. Then he opened his mouth and bit down on her neck. He sucked on the throbbing pulse of her neck as though it were the source of her body's fragrance.

“Say it again.”

A shudder ran down his spine. Because of her skill-less words, blood rushed to his lower abdomen. The thought that those words had unconsciously spilled out of her mouth filled him with excitement. He lifted his waist and drove his thickness deep into her.

“Ah! Ng!”

Because of his strong penetrations, her body swayed back and forth and she wrapped her arms around his neck. She hung her head on his shoulders and her upper body tilted slightly. His large hand reached out and reliably supported her back. He continued to thrust faster and deeper and her inner walls moved with his penis as though attached.

“Ang! Uuu... ah... good... deeper...”

“Haa, you’re really... something...”

Hugo grunted fiercely and buried his head in her neck.

“A! Aah!”

Her body shook frantically. He lay her back on the bed and she linked her hands around him as she held on. He roughly kissed her lips then nibbled and sucked on her breasts. His manhood fiercely pounded into her womb, stirring up her insides and touching her sensitive parts. Her vaginal walls reacted and began to gush with fluids.

“Ahhh!”

She cried out seductively as she reached her climax and her toes curled up in pleasure. Her insides spasmed intensely and wrapped around his member tightly. He paused his movements and endured the churning of her insides.

When her inner spasms subsided a little, he began to explore her hot, narrow path again.

“Ah! A-ng! Hugh!”

She uttered a coquettish cry as though imploring him and he kissed her teary eyes. He held her thighs firmly in his hands, spreading them apart and seeing her body in full bloom beneath him, he gasped for breath. Her taste was sweet like honey in his mouth.

His pleasure gradually intensified and when he reached his climax, he groaned in pleasure and closed his eyes. He stiffened as pleasure rushed from his waist to his head. His penis throbbed as he released semen into her. When his long release was over, they both collapsed onto the bed.

His breathing calmed down soon enough but her breathing took a while to calm down. He lifted his torso and slowly slid out of her causing her body tremble. She shrunk her legs and her entire body continued to shudder. Maybe he felt it because he placed his hand on the small of her back and pulled her strongly to his chest.

Tightly pressed against his bosom, Lucia choose to breathe. Her body hung listlessly. It was summer but she didn't dislike the heat from his body. He poured small kisses on her eyes, lips, and all over her face.

"Vivian."

"Hm..."

She felt like sleep was slowly approaching and blinked her eyes.

"Let's do it one more time."

He blocked her lips before she could reply. Their tongues entwined, sharing their innermost temperatures with each other and a passionate kiss followed. She felt out of breath as she responded to his kiss. The intoxicating and dizzying heat of the kiss filled her with pleasure.

Whether hot or passionate, she always got entranced by his kisses. His hand grabbed her inner thighs and pried them apart. Soon, there was a handprint on her tender skin.

"Hk!"

He penetrated her vagina with his already energetic rod, and her inner walls, soaked with love juices and semen, swallowed him with no resistance.

At this rate, there'll be no end. Lucia pushed away from his chest and twisted her waist but even so, he didn't budge. Although she knew she couldn't overcome him with strength, she angrily knocked on his chest.

"You do this every time."

“Cut me some slack. It’s been a while.”

“When do you ever care about that!”

No matter if it was once a day or after a few days, his endless pursuit remained the same. Every day, he bothered her like usual, and when it was after a long time, he would use time as a reason to be more persistent.

Hugo easily overpowered her whose anger was like a mermaid dragged out of water. He grabbed her wrist with one hand and held it over her head. He grabbed her thigh with his other hand, pulling her towards his waist. His length immediately sank deeper, reaching her deepest parts at once.

“Huu...”

“If you cooperate, I’ll really just do it one more time.”

She glared at him for a while, then traced his waist with her legs as though giving permission. She didn’t think he was going to obediently step down anyways.

She had already restrained to this extent so she wasn’t going to stop herself from sleeping anymore. In its own way, it was a trick she learnt when she couldn’t cope with his endless stamina.

Hugo tried not to push her as intensely as possible. All the positions he wanted to try kept floating in his head but no. He had to endure today. Although, if he really wanted to be considerate, he could just let her sleep for today but he ignored that contradiction.

For now, he was giving it his best in his fight against his desire. Lucia watched through blurry eyes as her body shook from his movements, and once in a while, she let out moans of pleasure.

Suddenly, she realized that he was still wearing his clothes. Only his bottoms were off as he thrust into her meanwhile under him, she was completely naked. At this contrast, Lucia felt strange.

“Shirt...”

“Shirt?”

“Your shirt... it’ll wrinkle.”

Hugo chuckled deeply and abruptly thrust into her.

“Aah!”

“Does it bother you? That you’re naked and I’m not?”

“...”

“Do I take it off? But if I do, you won’t sleep today.”

He chuckled mischievously at her curt reply of ‘don’t’. Then he captured her lips.

# Chapter 59

## Part 1

When Lucia opened her eyes in the morning, she found herself lying down with her head on his shoulder while one of his hands was wrapped around her shoulders and the other around her waist. They were both naked and only the lower part of their body was covered by a thin blanket.

Last night, he eventually took off all his clothes and flung them aside. Lucia lifted her hand and slowly stroked his chest from top to bottom. She enjoyed the feeling of unevenness and abdominal muscles beneath her palm.

Suddenly his hand holding her waist grew firm, and he moved to place a kiss on her cheek.

“What’s the occasion?” (Lucia)

“Huh?”

“You’re here, being idle.”

He nuzzled under her neck and kissed her chin repeatedly. It felt ticklish so she twitched and giggled.

“I should have days like this sometimes.”

It was both nice and unfamiliar for him to be next to her when she woke up in the morning. She wondered if he would be troubled if she told him that she wanted to wake up next to him in the morning sometimes, even if it wasn’t every day.

She wanted to keep this excessively diligent man on the bed a little more. The breeze blew over them and her hand kept roaming. She ran her soft palm over the firm and buoyant muscles of his chest. The feeling of his solid muscles was really nice. Her hand exploring his chest went down to his clearly defined abdominal muscles.

His hand caught her wrist at this point but she wanted to feel a little more. His obstruction was so heartless, she thought but when she looked up and met his eyes, that bitter feeling subsided. Hot passion lingered in his red eyes gazing at her.

Suddenly, using the arm wrapped around her waist, he pulled her into his bosom. Their naked abdomens were in close contact with each other and the only obstruction was the thin silk quilt.

His manhood was already huge and was lodged between her thighs. Lucia's face flushed red with embarrassment and her body grew rigid. He put his lips to her ear and whispered to her, his voice low.

"Are you seducing me?"

Hearing his voice laced with patient desire, her body automatically shook. When she buried her head in his chest without denying it, it was rather Hugo who was taken aback.

'Why are you so cute?'

His wife was usually very shy and pressured at the smallest contact with him in daylight. Normally, he would not turn down such an opportunity. Right now, he wanted to kiss her till she was breathless, leave his traces all over her pale skin, press her down and enter her hot body...

Damn it! He roared voicelessly. His schedule couldn't be cancelled at all this morning. To have to leave this prepared lavish meal...! Ugh. He sighed inwardly and laboriously pushed down his lingering desires.

"I have to go."

"...Oh."

"Sleep some more. I don't think your travel fatigue is fully relieved yet."

As he spoke, he felt a little poked at. It was actually him that bothered her all night before her fatigued was relieved. He should have allowed her some rest.

Hugo felt his poor self-control was pathetic and became worried that she would fall ill again. He decided he would ask Jerome to call for a doctor and make sure she got

treated when he left.

‘I have to ask for tonics too.’

Her stamina was too weak.

“Okay...”

Hearing her mumbled response, he lifted her chin and kissed her lips then he lifted himself off the bed. He picked up the gown lying on the end table and draped it on his body.

Lucia watched his back until he was out of the bedroom then she burrowed back into the blankets like a cat.

◊ ◊ ◊

When she got up again, it was almost noon. Lucia looked around the strange bedroom. It was not familiar like the one in Roam. Rather, the ceiling was lower than the one in the castle and the bedroom was a little smaller, but still, it felt spacious.

Now, she had to get accustomed to living here. Without any promise of return, it was very likely that they would be living in the capital for quite some time.

After having lunch, Lucia bid Jerome to prepare to head out.

“I would like to meet an acquaintance I haven’t seen in a long time. However, this acquaintance doesn’t know my identity. I will gradually talk about it but today, I would like to go inconspicuously to avoid surprise.”

It had always been on Lucia’s mind that when she came up to the capital, she would go see Norman next. She hadn’t contacted the woman for over a year so she must have been worried. Lucia wondered how Norman had been all this while.

“Before that, Milady, the doctor is waiting.”

“The doctor?”

“Master asked for a doctor to be called to examine Milady because Milady might fall ill from overexertion after the long journey.”

“...”

Lucia's face reddened a little. She doubted whether the 'overexertion' he referred to was actually from the fatigue of the trip. Quite frankly, the languidness she currently felt in her body was not due to the tiredness of travel.

“Alright. I just have to be examined?”

“He also asked for Milady to be given tonics.”

Really, this husband of hers. His plan of feeding well and eating later was very obvious. Lucia never thought her body was weak. Her outer frame was small and she had a tiny build but her body was healthy and not constantly sick.

However, after marrying him, she realized what it meant to be exhausted from a lack of stamina. Sex with him consumed so much energy. She didn't know till a few months after her first time. However, the number of months accumulated and after a year, she realized how fortunate she was to have Anna's assertion of once every five days.

“...Is that so. If you must, then I ask for a very concentrated diet.”

“As for going out, I will accompany Milady. Opportunely, Sir Heba is around, so escorting can be left up to him.”

As though reading her mind, Jerome quickly got everything ready. He donned rustic clothing unlike that of a Duke's butler and Dean also wore leather armor in order to look like a common escort and not like a knight.

The carriage prepared also looked ordinary without the crest of the family. The carriage rode off in the direction given by Lucia. It was a simple company of people. But unknown to Lucia, secret escorts were following the carriage.

The carriage finally stopped a little distance from Norman's two-story house.

## Part 2

Jerome and Dean followed a few steps behind Lucia as she came down from the carriage and headed towards Norman's house. Lucia knocked on the door. She expected to see Ms. Phil's plump face greeting her at the door but there was no reply.

She knocked a few more times but there was still no response.

'Did she go out? But Norman doesn't like going out. Why isn't Ms. Phil here?'

She felt sad that she had to leave without even seeing Norman's face so she stood in front of the door for a long time.

"Lucia!"

Lucia heard a voice calling her name from afar. A pair of two, male and female, were some distance away and out of the pair, the woman excitedly ran towards Lucia, waving her hand. She was no longer the lean girl from Lucia's memory. The surprisingly plump Norman rushed towards Lucia quickly.

"Lucia, right?!"

"Norman."

Norman hugged her tightly.

"My goodness. It's been so long. Let me look at you. Aiyo, you've become prettier. Look how fair your face is."

Norman was crying while holding Lucia's face and turning it left and right. Jerome and Dean were uncomfortable seeing the precious body of the Duchess mishandled and turned away slightly.

Norman fussed over Lucia, checking her face, hands and repeatedly saying things like 'you look healthy, thank goodness' or 'fortunately, you're not hurt'.

"Let's go inside. Just where and what have you been doing all this time..."

"Ah, Norman. This is..."

Lucia was curious about the identity of the man standing beside Norman. He was walking alongside with Norman and after Norman ran off, he followed after her.

The man grinned as though grateful for Lucia's lack of knowledge and promptly clung to Norman. Norman fixed him a lovable glare and jogged him with her elbow. Lucia's eyes widened at the very intimate display.

"I almost forgot to introduce him. This is Thomas. My fiancé."

"Fiancé?"

Lucia's voice increased in surprise. Norman gave an embarrassed laugh then briefly introduced Lucia to Thomas and vice versa then she quickly chased him away.

It was obvious from Thomas' gaze that he wanted to go into the house together and stick his head in their conversation but Norman pretended not to notice.

The man who turned around without concealing his regret gave off a nice and gentle impression. Norman linked arms with Lucia and tugged at her, showing her interest in the two attractive men behind Lucia.

"Who are those men? By any chance, you too?"

Norman sent Lucia a strange gaze. Which one is it? It was such a gaze. Lucia quickly resolved the misunderstanding. If Hugo were to hear this, it would be a disaster.

"No. They are my escorts."

"Escort? Wow. Lucia. What happened to you? I think we have a lot to talk about. But the people that came with you..."

"We are fine, you do not have to worried."

Hearing Jerome's reply, Norman's eyes widened in surprise. From his attire, she thought he was just a regular person but his tone and attitude showed etiquette and grace. It seemed he was not an ordinary person working under another.

Even though she knew it was rude, Norman kept glancing at the two men until she and Lucia entered the house and closed the door. As soon as the door was closed, the thoroughly maintained indoors of the small two-story house came into view.

As Lucia was seeing Norman's house again after a long time, she looked around in appreciation. The plainly formal atmosphere of the living room was unchanged.

Norman brought out some tea and sat on the couch facing Lucia.

"Where did Ms. Phil go?" (Lucia)

"She quit because of back pains. Plus I will be leaving soon anyways."

"Leaving?"

"You know, my fiancé you saw earlier. I decided to go to his hometown and get married."

"Norman, congratulations! When are you going?"

"The day after tomorrow."

"The day after tomorrow? You leave in two days?"

"Yes. We nearly missed each other. I didn't know you were coming so I was going to put this house up for rent. I was planning to have them contact me if you were to ever come."

Lucia felt deep regret. Norman was her first friend and her family. She was able to arrange a dress and meet Hugo with the money that Norman gave her, and she went to visit the ducal residence with the courage gained from Norman's advice.

If not for Norman, Lucia would not have been able to marry him. On the other hand, perhaps it was for the best. Lucia had experienced the life of a commoner and a noble.

So she knew how nobles looked at commoners. For the common people, the world of the nobility was an insurmountable wall, akin to heaven and earth and it could not be mixed with the world they lived in.

Most commoners would never see a high-ranking noble like a Duke in their entire lifetime. Lucia believed that Norman was not a person to change according to the status of another. But if she knew Lucia's real identity, she wouldn't be able to help feeling some distance in her heart.

The gap between the maid Lucia and the formerly princess but now Duchess Vivian was too big. It was hard to keep hiding this fact from Norman and Lucia was always worried that if she were to tell Norman, their relationship would become estranged.

She wanted to send Norman off as the Lucia that Norman knew. She wanted Norman to live a calm life, and perhaps if Norman didn't know, she could live carefreely.

"Actually, I am married too."

"What? Really?"

"I couldn't contact you because I got married and had to go far away with my husband in a hurry. I'm sorry."

"I see now. And no. I am getting married too so I know there are a lot of things to prepare and a lot to worry about. So I understand. Then, is it also your husband that placed those escorts?"

When Lucia nodded, Norman remarked, 'they did seem hired...' and exclaimed in admiration. Lucia was intimated by the questions of, how old, what kind of man, where does he live, where did you meet, that poured out non-stop from Norman.

Noticing that Lucia had difficulty answering, Norman did not push for an answer.

'In any case, I don't think the man Lucia is married to is an ordinary man.'

Norman recalled the men that followed Lucia as her escorts.

'Maybe she married a rich merchant or a noble. She did come with a valuable carriage from who knows where. Ah. A marriage with a noble. That is really what is called romance.'

"Is your husband good to you?"

"Yes, he's affectionate."

"Does he earn well?"

Lucia burst into laughter.

“Yes, he earns very well.”

“At night...”

“Oh, Norman!”

“What? Don’t act so innocent on what a married woman does. You’ve already done it all.”

Norman giggled as she looked at Lucia who was bright red. She teased Lucia about if she had any advice to share on a couple’s night to her junior since Lucia was a senior in marriage. Lucia blushed fiercely, not saying anything and seeing that, Norman began to giggle again.

“You know, I thought of sending you a letter to ask if you were okay but honestly, I was a little worried about the medium. Something strange happened, you see.” (Norman)

“Something strange?”

“Some woman came to me saying she was a fan of my novel. I couldn’t find out who she was but to my senses, she felt like a noble. Even if one doesn’t want to be exposed, whether it is from their tone or their actions. Something is different.”

“A noble can be a fan though.”

“That is true. But she was looking for you.”

“...looking for me?”

“She came to find me a few times, mentioned your features and asked what you guaranteed when you made a bank account. When I asked why she was looking for you, she said she was looking for news as you were someone she knew. I just said you were a *dongsaeng* I knew. She wasn’t interrogative but I pretended not to notice that she was quietly guiding me to talk about you. It isn’t someone you know, right?”

“I don’t know. I can’t... get a sense of who it is at all.”

Who could it be? Lucia was appalled by the fact that someone had come after Norman to ask about her. Someone was investigating her without her knowledge.

‘Maybe they were aiming for him, not me.’

While there was no reason for anyone to go after her, his political opponents could still try to take advantage of her to get to him.

“Does the lady still come?”

“No. She suddenly stopped coming. It’s already been several months. I haven’t seen her ever since.”

Lucia listened to Norman’s detailed description of the woman’s features and saved it in her mind. Since the woman tried to investigate, she would surely try to approach Lucia someday.

“Why are you looking at me like that?”

Norman had been staring at Lucia for a while now, so Lucia had to ask.

“It feels like you’ve changed a little.”

“It has been a while after all.”

“No. It’s different from that.”

Being the Duchess for more than a year, Lucia handled people under her and the leisure and skillfulness with which she dealt with the ladies of the northern high society flowed out of her unawares. Norman caught this with her sharp eyes. But Norman did not know exactly why or what was different so she just thought that something was different.

“Because you weren’t here, I got to learn precisely how great of a storyteller you are. I paid someone to get news of the noble circles a few times but it wasn’t as funny and informative as when you tell it.”

“Was there any interesting story?”

“The most memorable one... was news about the Duke of Taran.”

Lucia almost choked on the tea she was drinking.

“Apparently, the Duke of Taran got married. Do you happen to know anything?”

“I-I’m not sure.”

“Well indeed. People like us don’t quibble over which noble marries whom. But the rumors about the Duke of Taran’s marriage are interesting. They say, there was no wedding, and as soon as the secret marriage was over, he kidnapped the bride and dragged her to his estate.”

“Pk!”

Lucia ended up spitting out the tea in her mouth.

“What’s wrong? Is the tea too hot?”

“N-No.”

Norman handed her a handkerchief and Lucia wiped off the spilled tea on her skirt.

“Oh no. I don’t think the stain will come off completely.”

“It’s okay.”

“What was I talking ab... Ah, right. The Duke of Taran. Anyway, but it is said that the Duke lost it and did that because the woman that became the Duchess is a woman of incomparable beauty, beautiful enough to ruin a country.”

“...”

Lucia now had cold sweat forming on her back. That ‘incomparable beauty’ was none other than herself that was in front of Norman.

“At home, the Duke confines the Duchess...”

“Nor... Norman. Will you keep writing novels after you leave?”

Lucia couldn’t listen any longer so she quickly changed the topic.

“It is uncertain. If not in the capital, my novels might not sell well so I don’t know if it will be profitable. But I have the money I’ve made so far so I’m not worried. My fiancé

runs a shop that has been in the family for generations so I think income will be okay."

"How did this ever happen? Norman used to not believe in love."

"That is why life is fun. Hahaha."

The afternoon went by as Lucia spent several hours listening to Normans' love story. As Lucia listened, it was a very typical and romantic encounter, compared to the romance novels written by Norman but Norman told the story with her eyes shining as though she were talking about the masterpiece of the century.

She really seemed like the one of the heroines in her novels that fell in love.

"What of you? Are you happy?"

Norman asked at an interval and Lucia replied with, 'yes, I'm happy.' The happiness in her smiling face was not a lie. Lucia was truly happy with her days with him. Her sincerity was fully conveyed to Norman. Norman made an expression of happiness and relief.

"Well, this can work as your wedding gift. This house. I transferred it to you."

"This house?"

"Your account was still open in the bank so I left it to the bank manager to process it. I've processed all the paperwork and taxes so all that's left is for you to receive it."

"Norman, this is the first house you bought, isn't it? A house with such precious memories..."

"And that is why I would like for you to accept it. The memories in this house are memories built with you. I don't want to sell it, but I do not know when I will be back to the capital."

Nolan stood up from the other couch and came to sit beside Lucia then gave her a firm hug.

"Lucia, I always worry about you because you are much younger than me. You have to be happy. You will know where I live, so come to me if your husband makes you unhappy."

“Norman, thank you. If it wasn’t for Norman, I...”

Lucia was all choked up and couldn’t speak. They hugged each other and cried, sharing the joy of reunion and the sorrow of parting.

Lucia dissuaded Norman from seeing her off. She declined saying that Norman would be busy all day tomorrow preparing and the day after tomorrow, Norman would have to depart in the morning so there was no need to see her off.

Norman didn’t want to inconvenience Lucia who wasn’t free to go around without an escort. Even though the two of them said their goodbyes for a while inside, they stood in front of the door unable to let go of their regret.

“Please take good care of her. She is someone I think of as a younger sister.”

Norman requested this of Jerome

“Do not worry. We will serve with our utmost sincerity.”

Norman watched as Jerome carefully escorted Lucia to the carriage and she thought:

‘He seems like a really good man. I will be relieved if Lucia’s husband is such a man. Ai. Lucia is already married. My small dream is gone.’

Norman had planned to introduce Lucia to the younger brother of her fiancé for marriage, when they got back in touch with each other. That way, she and Lucia would move from east to west and live close to each other forever. She was worried that the young Lucia wouldn’t know a good man.

‘I hope you aren’t being held up by some strange guy and suffering.’

But still, she was relieved that the lonely Lucia was no longer alone. Even though the carriage was no longer in sight, Norman stood standing outside for a long while.

# Chapter 60

## Part 1

During dinner, Hugo began to talk about her outing.

“I heard you went out.”

“Yes. I went to see the acquaintance I asked you to deliver a letter to before. Do you remember?”

“I remember.”

Not only did he remember, but ever since Fabian turned in the last report, he had been closely monitoring, as well as protecting the female novelist.

He had already known that the female novelist would be getting married soon and he had even investigated to see if the man had deliberately approached the novelist.

Unbeknownst to Norman, she was about to marry a man that was guaranteed as non suspicious by the Duke of Taran’s Intelligence Unit.

“She is a precious friend of mine. As she is leaving the capital, I want to leave a connection to be able to help her, just in case she encounters any difficulties in her new home.”

“Do as you see fit.”

At his ready consent, her cheeks reddened a little. She didn’t think he was going to refuse but she felt elated when he simply accepted her request.

“Also... do you happen to know the rumor going around about me?”

“There are always many rumors in the capital.”

“It is such a ridiculous rumor...”

She didn't continue and just kept poking her dish with her fork causing Hugo to frown slightly. Through Fabian, he knew of all the rumors about her. The rumors were mostly ridiculous so as long as it wasn't malicious, a sensitive response would be rather counterproductive.

Fortunately, there were no malicious details in the rumors about her. The thought that she might have heard a bad rumor from somewhere he didn't know made Hugo's mood turn foul. If that was the case, he would call Fabian who didn't do his work properly and pound him to the ground.

"Rumors are usually ridiculous. What does the rumor say?"

Lucia was a bit hesitant at his question, then with a slightly reddened face, she tried to explain the unspeakable rumor while holding back her embarrassment.

"The Duchess of Taran is a great... beauty... so you... me... territory..."

"I've heard that. What about it?"

The rumor wasn't a big deal. He asked because he couldn't understand why it was making her very uncomfortable. Lucia also couldn't understand how he was completely unaffected by the rumor.

"It portrays you like some kind of kidnapper."

"For a rumor about me, it's more on the favorable side."

Lucia had heard all sorts of rumors about him in her dream. In addition, she had unintentionally delivered the rumor that he drank blood directly to his face. Considering his rather mirthful reaction to her words at the time, he seemed to be composed when faced with rumors about himself.

"But I mean, what incomparable beauty. It's so dumbfounding... In reality, when I go out to the circles, people will start talking."

"Why will they talk?"

She didn't know why he couldn't understand her after she had said so much.

"You know, because I'm not an incomparable beauty."

“What do you mean? You’re pretty.”

Lucia was stunned for a moment. And in an instant, her face went completely red. The servants quickly averted their gazes and acted like they didn’t hear anything. The servants, whose expressions did not change at all in this situation, were genuinely admirable.

“...Don’t tease me.”

“I never did. I say you’re pretty because you are pretty.”

Even though he teased mischievously her once in a while, he wasn’t one to joke insincerely. He had said the same thing once before but then, it was just the two of them. Lucia’s face reddened so much that it couldn’t get any redder and she was unable to sit still.

She got up like that and quickly left the dining room. A strong hand grabbed her arm, stopping her from going out to yard. At some point, he had caught up and was right behind her.

“Vivian, did I do something wrong?”

He thought she liked it when he called her pretty. It was clearly recorded like that in his list so he was taken aback by her reaction. Lucia furiously shook her head.

“No. I was... embarrassed because you said that in front of the servants.”

“Wow. It was ‘don’t touch’ in front of the servants now it’s ‘don’t say’ in front of the servants?”

Lucia wrapped her arms around his waist and buried her head in his chest.

“Mm. I don’t like stuff like that.”

While grumbling about why he should care if the servants are there, he returned her hug, wrapping his arms around her back. Listening to his grumbles, Lucia rubbed her head on his chest and chuckled faintly.

Are you happy? Norman’s questions sprang up in her mind. Lucia could give the answer ‘I’m happy’ over and over again. Ever since she decided to believe in him, she

was a little less anxious and a little more happy.

‘These damn rumors. I can’t even grab every mouth that says stupid things and stuff it.’

Other rumors didn’t matter but these days, Hugo was very worried that unfounded rumors involving women or scandals of the past would reach her ears.

Because of that, these days, Fabian was running around, day and night, gathering rumors.

## Part 2

It had been a few days since Lucia's entourage arrived at the Capital but no rumors of their arrival had spread. Hugo asked Lucia to rest and stay out of the society's gaze for a little while longer. So, Lucia spent these couple of days in very relaxed manner.

She knew this break wouldn't last long so she was enjoying it as much as she could. She had her lunch, looked around the mansion and went for a walk in the yard.

There was a fairly large plain of land between the gates and the entrance to the mansion. Instead of a garden, numerous trees were planted to obstruct one's vision from seeing the inside of the mansion. And since there was a small pathway in between, it was nice for taking a walk.

"Ooh!"

The sudden loud voice made Lucia jump in surprise. When an eye-catching man unexpectedly appeared in front of her, Lucia plopped down on the spot.

"Ah, Did I surprise you? It's me. Me. We haven't seen in a long time, yes?"

The eye-catching man was Roy Krotin. Lucia grabbed his outstretched hand and stood up. To Lucia, Roy was special connection. She hadn't known at the time but if it wasn't for Roy, she wouldn't have been able to meet Hugo.

It was Jerome's role to manage the guests and with Jerome's shrewd personality, there was no way he would have let her meet Hugo until she was judged to be a proper guest. Back then, Jerome was absent just in time and Roy acted as he pleased, allowing Lucia to meet with Hugo.

At that time, if Lucia had been unable to meet Hugo and was turned away, she wouldn't have had courage to visit again. It was the help of the heavens and at the same time, it was Roy's help.

"Since you're the Duchess now, should I be little different? But I don't really know that stuff."

There was no malice in Roy's grinning expression. Lucia grinned back.

“It’s fine. Do what you are comfortable with. It’s a pleasure to meet you like this after a long time. I have been wanting to give you my thanks.”

“Thanks? For what?”

“If not for Sir Krotin, how could I have met his Grace the Duke? It is thanks to Sir that I became the Duchess.”

“What... I didn’t... really do much...”

Roy sheepishly scratched his chin. Actually, the fact that he burst into laughter when Lucia proposed to Hugo always weighed on Roy’s mind. He never intended to ridicule her. It was just that the situation itself was very funny but people usually tended to perceive the opposite of his words and actions.

But when he heard her thankfulness instead, he felt a little awkward and happy.

‘Why does this man have such a bad reputation?’

In her dream, Roy Krotin was famous as the mad dog and Lucia had no exact line of contact with Roy so she could only know him from the rumors. But after meeting Roy personally, she realized he was very far from the notorious individual described.

He was cheerful, blunt and if one treated him with good will, he was sure to return the favor.

‘There is little to be trusted in these rumors, huh.’

According to the rumors surrounding the Taran Duke, he was a ruthless monster without blood or tears. And now, the rumors surrounding her were completely groundless.

In her dream, she got a lot of information about the circles from the rumors, but now she thought about it, most of them were probably lies.

Lucia made a small commitment to herself to not listen to rumors in the future unless she had directly met the individual concerned.

“I hear you have been the escort of His Highness the Crown Prince. Is it okay to be here at this time?”

“Okay or not, I won’t do it anymore. Even if it is Lord’s orders, I won’t! Do you know how hard it is to not go anywhere and just escort for more than a year? Even if it was fun to kill assassins from time to time, I want to quit right now.”

“...Ah, I see. It must have been hard.”

“But, what of my Lord?”

“He’s not in. He went out.”

“Darn. I ran over to have a round with my Lord cuz it’s been a while.”

“...A round? Do you mean fighting His Grace the Duke?”

“Mm? Hahaha! It’s right to call it a fight. A duel is a fight too.”

“Ah... a duel. Isn’t that dangerous?”

“There is no danger. We aren’t amateurs either. It’s only dangerous to those that swing the sword carelessly. Haven’t you ever watched a duel?”

“I haven’t. But His Grace might get hurt...”

‘Puhahaha!’ Roy burst into loud laughter.

“Hurt? Ah, even saying that is absurd. There is no one in the world that can hurt even the fingers of my Lord.”

‘Is he really such a great Knight?’

Hugo’s physique overwhelmed that of a knight’s. But maybe because Lucia had never actually seen him wield a sword, it didn’t feel real to her. She ran a workshop in her dream so she knew a little bit about those that were called Knights.

While they were uncompromising and simple, sometimes their temper exploded and then they were like an angry bison, ignoring what was in front of them.

‘He isn’t like a knight at all.’

She couldn’t feel the peculiar rough ambiance of a knight from Hugo.

‘Could it be because he is a Duke before he is a knight?’

Even though she had met a considerable amount of knights in her dream, she had rarely come across noble knights. Which also included a knighted Duke.

So she was slightly suspicious. Maybe the rumors about his military acts were more exaggerated because he was a Duke. In the first place, rumors were groundless so it was possible. If someone that knew the Duke of Taran heard her thoughts, they would be jaw-drop speechless.

“Sir Krotin!”

A voice as sharp as day interrupted them. Jerome approached the two of them with a stiff expression. Roy gave a silly smile and his expression was awkward as he spoke.

“Hello. Long time.”

Jerome fixed Roy a sharp glare then spoke politely to Lucia.

“Milady. If you go out without a maid, you may encounter some trouble.”

“Ah, you did say that before. I will make sure to be careful.”

Lucia inwardly rebuked herself for her thoughtlessness then she gave Roy a slight nod and began to head to the mansion, leaving the two men alone. Jerome watched until Lucia was inside the mansion then he turned to look at Roy.

“What is this insolence! That is the Lady of the House of Taran. She is not someone you can meet in a place where no one is around!”

This was the capital where one couldn’t know where eyes were hidden. And all sorts of scandals in the Capital originated from incidents that didn’t amount to much initially.

“Sorry.”

“I am saying you should be a little more careful.”

“Ah, I said I’m sorry. Even though I haven’t seen her in a long time, she truly hasn’t changed so I was just glad to see the Duchess.”

“Personal feelings, whatever it may be, should not be expressed carelessly, to a woman who had a husband. Do not assume that Master will forever be generous. If a terrible rumor of Milady arises because of Sir Krotin, he will be very angry.”

“Hmm. But the lord hasn’t ever been angry because of a women.”

“That is not just any woman but the Madam. Watch your words.”

The sight of Jerome acting like a mother protecting her cub was so unfamiliar that Roy blinked in surprise. Jerome was not inferior to Roy in behaving impolitely to the Duke’s women.

If Roy was the outspoken one, Jerome was the one that quietly considered scrapping them. In that sense, the two of them were strangely in great sync.

But apart from that, there was a big difference between them. Roy displayed amusement and bad temper, while Jerome faced the women with utter coldness like a Duchess that had forgotten her duty.

Except for that, the two men were incompatible. They were like cat and mouse. The amusing thing was that Roy was much stronger yet Jerome was the cat. Whenever Roy caused trouble, Jerome came out with enormous nagging and criticism.

The Roy that was fine with Hugo’s tendency to beat him up when he was mad, would only shrink in front of Jerome. Roy acted as he pleased, with nothing to fear, and he felt an inferiority similar to admiration about Jerome who was always precise and unyielding in his actions.

“Does the lord to that woman...”

At Jerome fierce glare, Roy quickly changed his words.

“Does the lord... like the Duchess?”

“Yes.”

“A lot?”

“A lot.”

“Mm. Then, if I am as before, will the lord be angry?”

“Extremely angry.”

One could only be glad if it ended with merely anger. Jerome was sincerely worried about Roy and was giving him a strong warning. If it was some other thing, Master would generously forgive to Roy. But if it concerned the madam, there would be no forgiveness at all.

“Okay. Well, it’s alright, I also don’t dislike that wom... the Duchess.”

“...Why?”

“How do I put this. She doesn’t give off a bad smell.”

“Smell? Do you mean perfume?”

The Madam wasn’t one to spray excessive perfume. In fact, Jerome also like this point of hers. The perfume of noble ladies was usually so potent that even if it was just two people, the smells got mixed up giving someone a headache.

“It’s not that...”

Roy was used to instinctively grasping the general temperament of a person when dealing with them. It was because of this that the Crown Prince took a fancy to him even though Roy was just staying at the Crown Prince’s side because of his lord’s orders.

Roy had bounded himself to Hugo for a similar reason too. The biggest reason was that he really liked his lord and the reason after that was because he didn’t particularly hate anyone that was around his lord.

“Anyways, it’s something like that. I get it now so I’ll be careful. I want to sleep till the lord is back. Where can I sleep?”

“...Follow me.”

# Chapter 61

## Part 1

Hugo leaned on his arms in thought as he sat in the carriage heading towards the ducal residence. From his expression, it was impossible to guess what he was thinking about. Fabian sat on the opposite side of the carriage and made a careful attempt to gauge his master's mood.

“Shall I look into Sir Krotin’s whereabouts?”

According to the Crown Prince, the Knight Roy Krotin disappeared without a word and his whereabouts were unknown. Insubordination, unauthorized absence and negligence. If one were to charge Roy of these crimes, it was not just once or twice.

“For someone like him, he has endured for long.”

Fabian couldn’t help but fully agree with that statement. In fact, it was amazing that Roy had lasted for more than a year without causing any trouble and was only giving a protest now.

“Leave it alone. He’s probably sleeping somewhere and will crawl in later.”

When Roy was done fooling around and showed himself, Hugo planned to give him some long due ‘advice’. It was around time for the efficacy of the last ‘medicine’ to have fallen.

“And as for the escort matter, I think that’s enough, it can stop now.”

Although Kwiz was still a prince, the gap between his present royal authority and his authority before the King died was like heaven and earth. Kwiz was under escort and guarding, not lacking to that of a King’s.

If someone were to move rashly against Kwiz, they would be charged with treason and their entire family would be under the danger of extermination, hence, there was no one that would move carelessly or take risks at this time.

“Yes, Your Grace.”

‘Just as I expected. His Grace is lenient with Roy.’

If Roy were to hear this, he would frantically argue that there was no way the Duke was lenient with him since he was beaten mercilessly however, the Duke’s leniency was acknowledged by all but Roy.

His master did not treat anyone else the way he treated Roy. Fabian somehow felt like he knew why. Roy was the only person that faced the Duke of Taran with cheekiness and without being afraid. When the Duke of Taran was with Roy, at times, he would seem like an normal person.

‘Mad dog, huh... what a fitting nickname.’

Nowadays, in the Capital, the knight Krotin was referred to as the ‘rabid dog Krotin’. There was a time when Fabian used to be worried that Roy would get into trouble for acting cheeky in front of the Duke.

That fellow certainly suited the name, mad dog. For a mad dog knows no fear.

“Who is the most famous designer in the Capital?” (Hugo)

“There are a few. From here...”

Fabian looked out the window and roughly gauged their current location.

“The nearest place is Monsieur Jeffrey’s boutique or Madame Antoine’s boutique.”

The male designer was immediately excluded from Hugo’s choice.

“Turn the carriage. Head to Antoine’s boutique.”

Immediately the carriage changed directions and began to head towards the Madame Antoine’s boutique. Antoine was definitely one of the famous designers in the capital. But, it was difficult to say that she was the most famous.

Depending on the dressing style that one preferred, the best designer would differ from person to person. The reason Antoine could catch a big customer today, was firstly because she was female and secondly because the location of her boutique was

closest to the Duke's carriage.

Even though the Duke of Taran did not make an appointment in advance and was interrupting at closing time, he was treated as a VVIP and received into the VIP suite.

High-class boutiques were very sensitive to information on the power situation of the country. Their main customers were wealthy and the wealthy were mainly high-ranking nobles and the high-ranking nobles were mainly people in power.

It was a sensitive time, now that power was reorganized on such a huge scale. Although there was some factor of unrest, most people expected the Crown Prince to become King without fail.

The fact that the Duke of Taran was the closest adviser of the new King was something that anyone with a little grasp of the current political atmosphere would know. It was the emerging dominance of a powerhouse that nobody would be able to deal with in the future.

To the powerful Duke, his richness was just an extra bonus but that extra bonus was the most attractive to Antoine.

As a highly prideful designer and the owner of her own boutique, Antoine strove to establish her pride in front of her tolerable nobles customers but today, in front of the Duke of Taran, she did not plan to do so. She was very amiable and welcomed her guests personally.

"It is an honor to meet your distinguished personage. Your Grace."

"I do not appreciate talking for long so I will be brief."

"Please, go ahead."

"I need a dress for my wife."

The hottest topic in society, the Duchess! Antoine fought to control her expression in order to avoid revealing her interest.

"Is Her Grace accompanying you? Is she waiting in the carriage?"

"I have heard that designers can personally visit on commission."

“Yes, of course. Your Grace. When would you like me to visit?”

“Tomorrow...”

On a second thought, tomorrow was not going to be possible. Today was fifth day in the ‘once every five days’ rule. Maybe because of the accumulate fatigue from travel but ever since she came to the capital, it had been difficult to do her to his heart’s content.

Moreover, yesterday, he was only a slightly late in returning home but she was already fast asleep. She had a huge fever before coming to the capital so Hugo was very sensitive about his wife’s health.

He didn’t want to wake her up when she was tired and in deep sleep so he just hugged her and slept.

Today, he planned to have a passionate night with her, doing both today’s and yesterday’s part. If she rested all day tomorrow, it wouldn’t be too much for the designer to visit her the day after tomorrow.

“No. Let’s have you come in next tomorrow.”

“You mean... in two days?”

Antoine was a famous designer. There were lines of people waiting to be fitted in her dresses. Nowadays, especially because of the upcoming coronation, it was busy day and night. Her schedule was tightly packed for a month.

Even when she wasn’t busy, she usually left a margin of at least a week to schedule a date. The sudden demand of a schedule in two days was difficult. However, Antoine was only worried for a short moment. In the first place, the customer in front of her was incredibly huge.

Antoine flicked her abacus and compared the publicity to be gained from the Duchess wearing an Antoine designed dress versus the damage to be received from the immediate and impractical schedule change.

The Duchess was at the center of conversation in the social circles. She had gone straight to her husband’s territory as soon as she got married and no one had ever seen her properly.

Whenever the noble ladies were being fitted for dresses in Antoine's boutique, they filled Antoine's ears with talks of the Duchess. The first appearance of the Duchess in the circles would certainly be an event of great interest.

"Understood. I will do as you say."

Antoine replied readily. She looked forward to meeting the rumored Duchess and that had also played a part in her reply.

## Part 2

“My wife is frugal. She thinks that it is a waste to buy a number of dresses.” (Hugo)

“Oh my.” (Antoine)

“But I think that my wife is deserving of the best as my Lady of the House.”

“What might you mean?”

“Ensure that you arrange everything you need, regardless of cost. It is in your capability to one way or the other, manage to persuade my wife. Depending on the capability shown, I will decide on whether or not to continue working with you in the future.”

At first, Antoine didn’t understand what the Duke was talking about but slowly, understanding began to fill her eyes. She had sometimes heard of a husband, or a father, sending someone to try and curb the senseless spending of their wife or daughter, but this was the first time she was seeing someone requesting to have their money spent.

‘Oh my goodness. The Duke of Taran is such a romanticist!’

Antoine gazed at the Duke of Taran with an entranced look in her eyes. It was the same gaze she used to look at the gold in her secret safe.

“Are you saying... not to worry about the cost?”

“Unreasonable charges will be refused.”

“Ho-ho. We are not a senseless boutique.”

Antoine quickly wrote down her estimated figures on a memo. Antoine loved romance and at the same time, she was a realist.

She knew that love didn’t feed anyone. Only love based on gold was eternal!

Antoine’s mind cleverly mulled over how to make the ambiguous boundary of ‘regardless of cost’ clearer. She wrote down half of her considered maximum amount

and placed it before the Duke. Just in case, it was to her advantage to take the pride of her customer into consideration.

“What do you think?”

Antoine was asking if he could handle a price of this extent. A dress was quite the expensive luxury. The newer the article, the more unique and exclusive the design, the higher the price skyrocketed. Antoine had seen people boast to their lovers about a dress and enter the boutique then their hearts would sink at the price and their prides would be damaged.

Hugo didn’t even blink at this challenge from Antoine. He smiled mockingly, picked up the pen and added a 0 behind the amount, dealing her a KO in a single blow.

When Antoine got back the memo, her hand shook repeatedly. Gasp. She felt breathless and grabbed her chest. Eureka! Fanfare burst out over her head. Luck fairies jingled tambourines as she hit the greatest jackpot of her life.

“I... I will definitely come visit in two days.”

“I look forward to seeing your capability.”

“Please, leave it to me.”

“Ah, I would also like you to introduce me to a good jeweler”

It was too cumbersome to carry much of the family-owned ornaments from Roam to the capital. Above all else, the fact that she didn’t have much jewelry kept bothering him.

Like a hungry beast positioned before flesh, Antoine’s eyes sparkled and she gave a buoyant smile.

“I will guide Your Grace to a jeweler that loses out slightly when compared to the Duchess’s elegance but can never lose when compared to other places.”

Antoine went out of the building with all of her staff and they gave a deep bow to send off the Duke of Taran. When the carriage was no longer in sight, Antoine gracefully straightened her waist and her eyes were ablaze with passion.

“The schedule adjustment goes into effect, right now! No matter what, the day after tomorrow shall be completely empty! Prepare every dress, shoe, hat, made so far to go into the design book!”

At Antoine’s instructions, her assistants began to move frantically. It was likely that from today till tomorrow night, light wouldn’t go out in Antoine’s boutique.

◊ ◊ ◊

The carriage arrived the jewelry store recommended by Antoine. The manager of the jewelry was a close partner of Antoine’s. Being fully thorough, Antoine had placed someone next to the coachman to guide the path of the carriage.

Sepia Jewelry had already gotten news ahead of time, chased away their few curious customers and closed the door of their shop, preparing to welcome only one customer. When the carriage arrived, someone was already waiting to receive the Duke with the highest etiquette.

Hugo browsed through the display of necklaces and bracelets, pointing to a couple items as he looked.

The items in Sepia Jewelry were high-class and cost up to five figures in the capital but in the eyes of Hugo who had seen all sorts of jewelry, they weren’t much. In his mind, it couldn’t be helped that the quality was low since he was buying them in a hurry.

Who knew whether he was really buying, or just window-shopping for he simply glanced at the items brought out, and pointed to something else again.

But no one seemed uncomfortable. Even if they were not told by Antoine in advance, it was common sense in the industry that when a big-shot of this level visited, the income from the visit was not small at all.

Several employees followed Hugo closely, moving as swiftly as possible and at some point, the presenting table was filled with jewelry.

“Let’s go with this.”

“Which one do you mean exactly...?”

The general manager rubbed his hands, lowering himself subserviently. The items presented to the Duke were all high-priced articles so, selling even one or two was a big hit.

“All of it.”

“Do... D-Do you mean everything?”

“Isn’t it for sale?”

“No! No, I mean, you’re right! We will have it ready immediately!”

The general manager trembled with delight. When he thought of the commission from the sale today, he felt like bursting into laughter.

“How long will it take?”

“A... A little wait... it will be out soon.”

Hugo picked up a clear yellow teardrop-shaped sapphire necklace from the table(1). It resembles the color of her eyes.

“Pack this up now and deliver the rest.”

“If it is not urgent, may we deliver at daybreak tomorrow? These are high-quality items so we wish to guarantee their safety.”

“You may.”

After almost emptying a jewelry shop, Hugo finally went home.

# Chapter 62

## Part 1

Upon his master's return to the mansion, Jerome received his master's coat and reported the small incident that happened earlier in the day.

"So. In summary, you do not know where that fellow is."

"Yes, Your Grace. I am sorry."

Roy woke up after getting a long lazy sleep and stealthily slipped away. Maybe he got scared since Hugo was about to return. If that fellow made up his mind to escape, no one couldn't find him, and even if they knew where he was, there was no one with the ability to drag him back unless Hugo went there personally.

"When he shows himself later, tell him I said he should stay put. Do not try to seize him by force."

"Yes, Your Grace."

After taking a bath, Hugo went into his wife's bedroom. He went up behind her as she sat in front of the dressing table, kissed the back of her neck and fastened the necklace he bought on her neck.

At the coldness on her neck, Lucia flinched and looked in the mirror to see what was on her neck then her eyes widened in surprise. The teardrop-shaped jewel twinkled brightly in the mirror.

"You don't like it?"

"Ah no, it's not that. It's pretty. I was just wondering what day it is."

"Gifts aren't only for special occasions."

"I'm asking because I don't really know but... this isn't an exorbitantly priced jewelry,

is it?"

When she thought of the present he gave her for her birthday in the spring, she felt overwhelmed, like her stomach was still upset. Following his first gift of a white diamond necklace, he presented her with a red diamond necklace in the spring.

Because its diamonds weren't as heavy as the ones on the white diamond necklace, she had worn it to her next tea party. A noble lady, particularly interested in jewelry, had instantly recognized the red diamond necklace, and mouthed off about how much it could be won for at a jewelry auction.

Hearing the enormous sum, Lucia had felt faint. She had expected it to be expensive but the price was way above her expectations.

"Do you want something like that? Maybe at the jewelry auction next month..." (Hugo)

"No!"

Seeing the serious look on her face, Hugo chuckled and turned around. He climbed onto the bed and plopped down with his hands on the pillow.

"Your husband is rich. Try to enjoy being a woman that has a rich husband."

Instead of giving an answer, Lucia smiled weakly. She was born poor. Even when she lived as Count Matin's wife, she was unable to enjoy the luxury. She didn't have to worry about starving to death in the dream but she always worried about her livelihood.

It was not that she lived with the values of honest poverty but that the circumstances were just not well.

However, Lucia could not forget the Duchess that she saw in her dream. The Duchess was draped in expensive garments and ornaments but she did not seem happy at all. Lucia felt like she would change and become like the Duchess from her dream if he were to leave her; Unable to escape the luxury that was once tasted, and trying to fill the void in her heart with it.

She didn't want to step into that inescapable swamp.

"Do you dislike jewelry? Or is it that you dislike it because of the person giving it?"

"Why do you say that? I am grateful. It is pretty and I like it."

"I know you're not being sincere."

He didn't expect her to react dramatically like other women did but he was upset that she looked strangely burdened by his gift.

Time and time again, he was shocked by her words asking if he would cheat in the capital. It were as though she would give him anything when she opened up and fully accepted him on the bed but in reality, her heart was closed and she did not trust him. What other way was there if she refused even his gifts?

She did not acknowledge his persistent efforts to obtain her heart. Just the sight of her made him feel her preciousness and the mere thought of her made him feel jittery inside yet his Ice Witch did even not think of melting at all.

"Are you angry?" (Lucia)

"I am not."

He replied sourly, contrary to his words. Lucia gazed at him in thought.

'If it were in the past, I would have been hurt by his blunt words.'

She probably wouldn't have said a word and suffered in silence. However, now, she could afford to not worry too much even if he was grumbling. When did she become able to confidently tell him, 'you can go and sleep in your room today'?

Lucia stood up, her gaze fixed on him. She slowly took off her bathrobe and it fell to the floor, revealing her nude body underneath. Hugo was lying down indifferently and at this sight, he jolted upright.

Feeling his stunned red eyes staring at her intensely, she looked at him and her eyes curved beautifully as she smiled. Looking at his wife smiling like an enchantress as the amber necklace glistened off her fair naked skin, Hugo's mind went blank.

Lucia walked towards the bed without looking away from his hardened center. Her boldness surprising even herself.

He always gazed at her passionately. His gaze was as though he was seeing the

fantastical beauty from the rumors. At first, she felt embarrassed but as she got used to his gaze, she began to think, 'maybe I am a little attractive.'

And when she enticed him, she became confident that she could go forward with it. She climbed onto the bed and slowly approached him on her knees. She looked into his wavering red eyes that were as though she had seized them and smiled.

It was a crafty smile that she herself did not realize. Hugo was frozen stiff as he watched her climb over his body and mount him. She sat down as tightly as possible on the center of his thighs.

His rigidness peaked from beneath his bathrobe, pressing hard against her behind. His Adam's apple moved flinchingly. She grabbed the necklace on her neck and lifted the yellow sapphire to her lips, kissing it, then she gave him an odd smile.

"The necklace, does it suit me?"

"...Very."

His voice sounded strained.

"It's not that I don't like the gift but I have a small liver(1). Please understand that I worry of you going bankrupt."

"Even if the sky splits in two, that won't happen."

Lucia slid her hands into his bathrobe and slowly caressed his firm chest. Meeting his quivering gaze, she felt a thrill of excitement from the situation she was leading.

"They say the luxury of a woman can shake the foundation of a nation."

Much less that of a family. Although Hugo knew what she meant, in his mind, if she wanted it, he would set up a nation and give it to her.

"Shake as much as you want."

The Taran family could handle that much. Even though Hugo grit his teeth at the disgusting history of his family, he acknowledged its strength. At his arrogant confidence, Lucia smiled as if it couldn't be helped. Humility was not the virtue of Hugo Taran.

He drew in to kiss her but she tilted her head backwards slightly. He tried again, but she avoided it again.

His seething expression revealed his wonder at her actions and she kissed his lips, catching him by surprise then she quickly pulled away. Seeing his eyes ablaze as he panted, Lucia burst out in laughter. He was at the brink of pouncing on her.

She caressed his cheeks and kissed him again. This time too, he was unable to refuse her attack. Unwilling to be outdone, he held the back of her neck, kissing her fiercely.

She followed the movements of his tongue as it deeply fondled every corner of her mouth and her hands clutching the front of his robe trembled. His hot tongue wrapped around her tongue, drawing her in. The frenzied kiss continued for a long time.

In the meantime, his hands explored above her waist, sweeping up to her shoulders. After a good while, he moved away and Lucia gazed at him with misty eyes. Like an afterimage, she could still feel the movements of his tongue occupying her mouth.

Looking at her swollen lips, Hugo licked his lips.

“Where did you learn these things?”

Lucia laughed at the puzzlement in his voice.

“From you.”

“I don’t remember that.”

“Applying what one has learnt is the attitude of a good student.”

He gave an odd smile as though saying he was in trouble then mumbled.

“It’s a good thing I’m not king.”

“Huh?”

Hugo felt like he would become a wild king that ruins his country because of a woman. While muttering that to himself, he wrapped his hands around her waist and took her pale breast into his mouth.

“Ah!”

In an instant, he stole the initiative. Lucia moaned and twisted at his intense caresses. He always wanted her passionately. And she was also the same.

## Part 2

With every intense thrust from behind, Lucia's body shook tremendously. She squeezed the sheets tightly, trying to hold on, but her arms kept wobbling.

“A-! Aah!”

He grabbed her waist and mercilessly thrust his penis in and out of her. Because of their position, his thrusts could reach deeper and her insides felt jittery. It was too deep. She couldn't tell if it was pain or pleasure as she screamed coquettishly.

“Ah! Ang!”

Whenever his thigh hit her butt, her body shook in response and her eyes glistened with tears. His relentless thrusts showed no signs of ending. Unable to bear the pressure any longer, her arms fell and her upper body collapsed.

Her knees could barely support her and were trembling in exhaustion. She felt herself running out of breath as her cheeks rubbed against the sheets. Her eyes heated up and tears fell from her eyes and onto the sheets.

“No... No more. Hk...”

In spite of her pleas, he slammed against her butt, pushing even deeper. At the stimulus, her insides squeezed his penis tightly causing him to flinch then he resumed his intense thrusts.

The sensation of his firm manhood plunging deep into her caused her body to jerk and twitch. Every time he ravaged her insides, a thrill ran up her spine and her sight flickered repeatedly.

“Hugh... Haa... Tired... I'm tired.”

“Good girl. It's almost... over. Just a little more.”

His voice was cracked and heavily subdued as he spoke in a soothing manner. Lucia knew from experience. The him right now was like something had snapped in his brain. Pleas wouldn't get to him.

It was only once in a while but there were times he would keep pushing ruthlessly. Every time that happened, she would feel like she was bitten and drained by a large fang.

“...I’m in trouble. You’re squeezing so tight... can’t even breathe.” (Hugo)

“Hk. Don’t... say that...”

Lucia wanted to block her ears. Even though his erotic taunts were embarrassing, she was more embarrassed at the excitement that coursed through her body at his words.

Every time he rammed into her, her body trembled threateningly as though it would fall. If it weren’t for his strong hands holding onto her hips and thighs, she would have already fallen. Even though she was extremely tired, she could feel her vagina walls going into spasms.

Every time her inner walls pulsed like a heartbeat, his breathing grew rough. His muscular frame drove her curvy body and his flowing sweat fell onto her back.

It was the first time she was led to climax so many times while only being taken from behind(1). Since it was an exhausting position for her, it wasn’t one that they usually maintained for long.

Her tears and pleas as she trembled and accepted his penis, stimulated his beast-like desire for conquest and possession. She was his. His woman. No matter how much of her he had, it was not enough.

“Hugh. Please... Hhng!”

“If you want me to stop..... stop tightening. You won’t let me go.”

One of his hands began to knead her breast and she felt a smarting pain from his bite on the back of her neck. This time she groaned. She had no strength to move her waist. His raging erection showed no sign of abating and he repeatedly penetrated her body with great force.

His semen, from his several previous ejaculations, drooled down her thighs with every merciless thrust. The sound of squelching and smacking could be continuously heard as his thighs repeatedly met her buttocks.

Lucia felt dizzy from her constantly shaking vision and closed her eyes. He grabbed her hair, controlling his strength to avoid hurting her.

His other hand wrapped around her stomach and lifted her up in order to elevate her buttocks. Her hands closed around the sheets, gripping it tightly.

“Hk!”

He gave a heavy thrust and released into her. At the feeling of his searing hot fluid pouring into her vagina, her entire body shuddered and trembled.

Filled with enjoyment from the sexual pleasure, Hugo let out a subdued moan. He wanted to sow his seeds deep inside her womb. If his seeds were to take root and sprout in the depths of her body, she might become his completely.

‘Damn it.’

That was impossible.

When her inner walls finally stopped convulsing and her tightness had loosened somewhat, he began to pull out slowly. He released his hand supporting her body and like that, she quietly fell onto the bed.

Apart from her shoulders moving up and down as she panted, she didn’t move an inch. Cloudy liquid, unswallowed by her vagina, ran down her thighs. Seeing this, his red eyes ignited as though set on fire.

Hugo’s throat felt parched. It was akin to drinking salt water to quench one’s thirst; his thirst seemed like it would lessen if he held her but worsened instead. It was extremely hard to reign it in.

Hugo slowly closed his eyes and reopened them. Upon doing so, his eyes that were murky with desire had become much clearer. This was enough. He forced down his turbulent desires. He brushed away her hair wet with sweat and revealed her round forehead.

Her eyes were closed and she was breathing heavily. It was unknown if she was asleep as her wet eyelashes rose tremblingly. Before shutting her eyes, she had fixed him a gaze full of reproach.

His lips curved gently and he stroked her hair, feeling apologetic. The slight crease on her delicate forehead slowly unfolded.

He put on his robe, wrapped her body with the sheets, and lifted her body into his arms. She opened her eyes slightly and closed it again. She had no strength to respond and her body dangled from his arms.

He walked out of the bedroom and headed towards the bathroom. A prepared warm bath should still be available.

◊ ◊ ◊

Lucia slept like the dead and woke up when the sun was high in the sky.

'I'm so stiff.'

It wasn't a bad thing that her husband was a man of great stamina but sometimes, it was a problem when he went over the limit.

After groaning and finally getting up, Lucia was greeted to a small pile of jewelry that was delivered in the morning.

In the receiving room, a stack of jewels lay piled up on the table as though presenting themselves to Lucia. The maid's eyes twinkled with pride as though saying 'hurry up and see them'.

'This man, really'

Lucia was stunned speechless and couldn't believe her eyes. Even for presents, there was a limit. How much would all this be? She felt a headache coming.

She thought of telling him her thoughts on his excessive spending when he came back in the evening but, the events from the previous night flashed into her mind.

'...He'll get upset.'

He certainly would. Yesterday, he was sulking that she received his necklace unenthusiastically so if she asked him to return them, he might get angry. There was no need to make him feel bad after he had gone out of his way to give her a present.

[Even if you are gifted a single flower, embrace him and thank him like there is no gift more precious in world, and if there is any passion, that passion will overflow.] (2)

The advice that she heard from the northern noblewomen came to mind.

'Alright. It's being given anyways so let's accept it rather than leave it to rot. It's still money if it's sold again.'

As she could not see all the contents of the gifts from just looking at it, she carefully unpacked the contents of the boxes, one by one and the afternoon passed with her trying each one on herself.

In the evening, he came back early and they were able to have dinner together.

During the meal, he said, "Tomorrow, a designer will be visiting. I am of the opinion that you need a dress."

"...a dress?"

"This is the capital. If you wear outdated dresses like in Roam, you will be subject to ridicule. The prestige of the Lady of the House is the prestige of the family."

Lucia did not say anything to that because his words were true. The nobles of the capital were particularly sensitive to fashion. In particular, the attire of high-ranking noblewomen was the main gossip of many women.

Even if she could not to become a fashion leader, it would be difficult if she drew ridicule upon herself with her attire. Indeed, it would seem that the dresses she had presently were not suitable for her upcoming social activities in the capital.

# Chapter 63

## Part 1

After their meal, Lucia took a walk with him in the yard. When they were in Roam, he would often take evening walks with her whenever he had time. Her husband was a busy and diligent man.

There wasn't much of his time that she could have before they retired to bed. So, Lucia was much happier with this leisure time of walking with him than receiving an expensive gift.

"They were all individually beautiful and lovely. Did you choose everything yourself?"  
(Lucia)

"I did." (Hugo)

Hugo had just packed them up after one glance but it was correct to say he chose everything himself.

"Do you like it?" (Hugo)

"Yes, thank you."

Lucia was more grateful for his heart of giving rather than any jewelry.

"You seem to know a lot about female jewelry. I guess because you've gifted a lot."

Lucia wanted to take those words after ot left her mouth. She had no intention of criticizing him and thought that her words had crossed the line. She felt he would be displeased and was about to apologize for her slip of the tongue but he spoke first.

"Vivian."

He gave a deep sigh, reached out to hold her wrists and stopped walking.

“Can’t you forget the things that happened before we got married?”

Lucia thought he might get angry but he looked unexpectedly vulnerable. She gazed at him blankly.

“Do I keep mentioning things from before our marriage? I’ll be careful in the future.”

“That is not what I meant. This is from a while ago but, do you remember what you said when you asked to modify our contract?”

[Please do not go making lovers without my knowledge. If you get tired or disgusted of me, and want to leave me for another woman, please tell me first. I do not wish to hear it from another person’s mouth.] (1)

“Yes. I remember.”

“I won’t have a lover without your knowledge not will I leave you because I am tired or disgusted of you so I would like it if you trusted me.”

Lucia’s heart began to race. She didn’t know the intention behind his words. A huge whirlwind began to sweep through her mind. She was the one that made a mistake. She didn’t have any reason or right to criticize or mention his past actions before their marriage.

It was possible that he had a personality which was bogged down by rules. Therefore, after the legal contract of marriage was established, he kept to it strictly.

However, that didn’t agree with the person that Lucia had been watching all this time. He was a wilful person that had no qualms of changing the existing rules to suit himself.

“...Why?”

Lucia couldn’t make heads or tails of what he was thinking and mumbled absentmindedly as she looked at him. She wanted him to say something, anything, so she could draw a conclusion that ‘ah, it was a meaningless remark’.

However, his pupils quivered with disappointment. He made a face that said he didn’t know what to say. He repeatedly opened his mouth as if to say something then he closed it.

‘Why...?’

Lucia felt her fingers going numb so she clenched and unclenched her fists. This man in front of her. He was hurt.

The man whom Sir Krotin was so confident of, that no one under the sky could hurt even his fingers, was now in pain from her short words.

A long time ago, Lucia had once felt like this. When she had sharply told him that she would never fall in love with him, just for a short moment, she peeked at his pain.

At the time, she was not in a situation to think deeply so she had pushed it aside. It was such a long time ago that she had almost forgotten her feeling from back then. But now, she was left with a bitter taste in her mouth.

‘Could I have...’

Her heart felt too full for words and ached like it was guilty. It hurt but it was a pain that she hoped wouldn’t end forever.

‘Do I... mean something to you?’ (Lucia)

After carefully choosing with words, Hugo opened his mouth.

“I know you cannot believe me. And I understand why.”

He had made a lot of mistakes with her. Ever since their encounter with Sofia Lawrence, it was the worst. Before they got married, he brought documents and told her not to interfere in his private life.

He omitted the wedding ceremony because he found it bothersome, on their first wedding night, he only satisfied his greed and didn’t take her into consideration. It was himself that thoroughly sought out her body.

“I will try. So, look kindly on me.”

‘Why? Why and for what reason are you trying?’

Lucia looked at him in silence for her question wasn’t answered. As her silence grew longer, Hugo sighed and turned away, sweeping a hand through his hair.

Looking at him fidgeting, Lucia's eyes gradually began to grow clearer and brighter.

'Is it a whim?'

She did not know what he did to his other lovers. She didn't know how he whispered words of love to the person he was once most affectionate with.

The only thing she had seen was the scene of him heartlessly rejecting his lover. And that scene was deeply rooted in her heart as a fundamental fear. She thought that someday, she may be in Sofia Lawrence's position.

"...I do not care about what happened before our marriage." (Lucia)

"Really?" (Hugo)

"I do not have the right to."

"..."

I'm going crazy. Hugo mumbled under his breath. Could any wall be stronger than this? She didn't, even for an instant, step away from the line that she drew around herself.

"I believe in you." (Lucia)

"...You do...?"

"I believe that if you get a lover, you will tell me and not meet in secret. You keep your promises."

Sure enough, she was a witch. In a short moment, she shoved him down a cliff then she pulled him up again. Hugo felt bleak. He didn't where to start from to unravel the twisted strings. His previous solutions of cutting the twisted strings instead of unraveling them, was of no help in this situation.

"Why do you want me to trust you?" (Lucia)

Hugo was at loss for words. He hadn't thought about the reason. He barely managed to make up an excuse.

"...You cannot live in the same house with someone you cannot trust."

When she began to watch him in silence again, Hugo grew nervous wondering if he made a mistake.

‘I have no idea.’ (Lucia)

She knew but she didn’t. It seemed like she was getting close to the answer but it also seemed like she was back to the beginning.

‘Does he...?’

It was a very slight suspicion but Lucia didn’t think it was possible.

Lucia held expectations that she would someday receive his love. It was a vague and huge desire that she didn’t know when it would be accomplished. It could not be that simple. So, she excluded that option while looking for the reason why he was being this way.

‘He does quite like me.’

His actions were not just him being dutiful as a husband. Of course she knew that he saw her favorably and treated her well.

‘Is it that he needs trust because he is fond of me?’

He was a knight, the lord of a family and the lord of a large territory. He was in a position where he couldn’t place someone that he didn’t trust beside him. Trust is completed when it is shared with the other. When she thought of it like that, she could somewhat understand it, although not entirely.

“What you’re saying is... what you mean is, you will be faithful as a husband, so I should trust you, right?”

When she put it like that, it seemed right but also didn’t. Hugo couldn’t exactly put his finger on it so he just nodded.

“Okay, I will.” (Lucia)

Her answer was concise, contradicting the suspense he had been in so far. Hugo looked at her doubtfully. He was afraid she would say something and stab him in the back.(3)

“Depending on how you do.” (Lucia)

Nevertheless, she didn’t betray his uneasy expectations.

“...If it’s a joke, it’s not amusing.”

“I’m not joking.”

Actually, she had said it as a joke but when he took it so seriously, she got embarrassed. She threw out those words prudishly, turned and began to walk ahead.

He looked at her absentmindedly then he took a step forward. He didn’t know what to do to get her to trust him. With the way things were going, he wondered if she would hear some absurd rumor and change her mind.

‘I have to call Fabian.’

Fabian was pronounced to be working overtime today again.

## Part 2

Antoine arrived at the ducal residence with two assistants and several workers. She ordered the workers to neatly display the sample dresses, hats and shoes that she brought along with her in the receiving room.

It was a usual task so they worked very cooperatively and in the blink of an eye, the atmosphere of the receiving room was changed to that of a boutique's.

Lucia came down from the second floor after hearing that the designer had arrived and paused as she walked into the receiving room that was now unfamiliar.

Just in time, the workers finished their task and quickly rushed out while Antoine and her two assistants who were standing behind her, gave a deep bow.

"I offer my greetings to the Duchess. I am called Antoine, manager of a small boutique."

Lucia had often heard the name Antoine. It was her first time meeting Antoine but the woman was very famous in her dream. Antoine was one of the first-class designers that dominated in popularity among noblewomen.

But Countess Lucia was unable to even conceive the idea of buying a dress from a famous designer. Count Matin spent all his money like water but was terribly stingy to everyone but himself, even if it was family. Lucia could only wear a few fashionable dresses after fixing them countless times.

"This will be expensive."

That was the first thought that came to Lucia's mind. But, when she went out to the social circles, the talk of the women would be who designed the Duchess' dress.

It was not possible for anyone to create fashion on their own(1). If they didn't have skill, the easiest way was to get help from a famous designer.

"It's nice to meet you. I heard you would be coming to help me today."

"It is an honor to meet your noble personage."

Antoine averted her gaze in order not to give the impression that she was blatantly

observing but with her sharp falcon eyes, she quickly grasped the overall feel and appearance of the Duchess. Thanks to her experience with countless customers, this didn't take long.

Antoine was thrilled with excitement before coming to the ducal residence today. Ever since she became a well-known designer, it was her first time feeling so nervous before meeting a client. She could once again feel the excitement that she felt in the days when she was doing her first fittings as a trainee.

Antoine had already heard that the Duke had swept away all the merchandise on display at Sepia Jewelry.

The golden egg she would soon acquire dangled before her eyes, and her heart raced at the appearance of the romanticist Duke that stimulated all her senses so she couldn't sleep at night.

Her boutique was a place where famous people in the high society visited frequently so it was at the center of all sorts of rumors. Simply eavesdropping on the chatter of noblewomen gave one access to endless information.

Nowadays, rumors about the Duchess of Taran were the most lively and interesting rumors. Antoine knew that, no matter how interesting, rumors were mostly lies and speculations, so she wasn't that entranced by it unlike young boutiques designers.

She had seen numerous topics rise to the spotlight and disappear without a word. The rumors of the Duchess were like dust on a barren road. No one had ever seen the Duchess properly and one rumor led to another.

Antoine assumed that once the Duchess actually appeared, this would all settle, like morning weather after a rainy day. However, her assumption began to waver when the Duke of Taran added onto that amount on her memo. And following the sellout of Sepia Jewelry, that assumption was in danger of collapsing.

And today, as soon as she saw the Duchess of the rumors, something burst open in her heart.

'Oh. My. Goodness.'

It was completely unexpected. This was a type she had never seen in the high society filled with flashy, sensual, and confident noblewomen.

The world that Antoine saw was very different, compared to what many people saw. The doll-like figure that people often referred to as beautiful was so cliché that it wasn't interesting to her.

A beauty as defined by Antoine, had to be able to stimulate her creativity. And the Duchess was an appearance of new material to work with. She was fresh and charming.

While Antoine sat on the couch and drank tea served by the maid, her sight was continuously trained on the Duchess.

"This design book is filled with the collection of dresses that I have made over the years. Please look through it and tell me if any piece strikes your fancy."

Antoine had no qualms about referring to the dresses that she made as her pieces.

Lucia's expression was calm as she looked at the luxurious dresses in the fairly thick book on her lap, one by one. Just as her expression portrayed, she was not that impressed.

In her dream, she had seen enough dresses to be sick of them. She didn't know much about fashion. To her, it was just a distinction between more glamor and less glamor.

Ball dresses were meant more for show than practicality so if one wore them for a several hours, they would get very uncomfortable. To Lucia, apart from feeling uncomfortable, there was nothing more to wearing a luxurious dress.

'It seems this won't be easy.'

Antoine could now understand what the Duke of Taran meant when he said 'my wife is frugal.' Usually, when noblewomen received the design book, they would express their desire with an ecstatic expression. Compared to that, the Duchess' expression was too calm.

In addition, the dress that the Duchess was currently wearing was very much simple. Only the base material was high-class and there was no indication of dressing herself up.

"Is there no piece that catches your eye? I can only apologize for this inadequate display of items."

"No, these are all wonderful and lovely. It's just, I'm not quite familiar with this subject... you are the expert, you can handle it appropriately at your discretion."

At your discretion. There was no worse customer than this. Antoine felt a sense of crisis and at the same time, she felt fired up with a sense of challenge. The amount on the memo written by the Duke glimmered in front of her. Antoine couldn't miss out on the gold within her reach.

"May we take your measurements?"

Antoine had Lucia stand in front of a full-length mirror and slowly walked around her. In the meantime, her assistants were at the side of the Duchess, measuring her dimensions with a tapeline.

Antoine stood a little distance away and looked at the Duchess as a whole. She got a rough outline of the Duchess' measurements and drew up an attire in her head.

'It won't suit her.'

Antoine quickly realized this. The dress she thought of was glamourous and styled to make the chest stand out. It was a form that showed the body in a sensual matter and was the fashion these days. But in Antoine's opinion, if the Duchess wore such a design, rather than suiting her, it ran the risk of making her look vulgar.

'The Duchess is on the paler side. If one adds color, there is a different charm.'

On a slender figure, it was better to emphasize the slim waist and stir up the protective instinct rather than emphasize sensual charm. If the Duchess's white, clear skin was made the focus and supplemented with light makeup, it was possible to create a pure and enchanting atmosphere.

A new picture was drawn in Antoine's head. A vibrant creation was brought to life.

Antoine began to instruct her assistants. Her assistants moved like her hands and feet limbs, bringing her what she wanted and understanding her small gestures and glances.

Antoine used a cloth to emphasize the lace of the simple dress that the Duchess was wearing, then she used a pin to hold down her slight modifications to the shape of the dress. To finish, she gave a partial makeover to simply change the feel of the dress.

The whole process took place very quickly. Then Antoine took Lucia to the mirror.

“What do you think?”

Antoine asked while smiling triumphantly.

Lucia’s eyes widened as she looked in the mirror. It was like magic. With just a rough touch here and there, the feel had changed completely. The dress she often wore had become a completely new attire and there was something beautiful about her appearance in the mirror.

She couldn’t really put it in words but something was different.

“Your Grace is very attractive. I do not know why are hiding this charm.”

Lucia touched her face and looked at her appearance in the mirror with admiration.

‘Good. Good.’

Antoine gave a smile of satisfaction. Like a hyena, she didn’t let go once she had bitten. Antoine’s hunt had only just begun.

# Chapter 64

## Part 1

Hugo returned home late at night. Lucia's expression was dark as she greeted him upon his return home. Her gaze was downcast and a gloomy aura revolved around her.

Hugo grabbed her chin and lifted her face to meet his eyes. She was surprised at the sudden contact and became conscious of the servants' gazes and turned her away.

Hugo wasn't concerned about the servant's gazes and held her chin firmly. Her repeated avoidance of his eyes was very worrying.

"What's wrong?"

"..."

"Jerome!"

Jerome quickly answered to the sharp call of the Duke.

The butler, Jerome, had been developing new ways to improve his competence and chased away the servants with his eyes because the mood around his two masters was starting to turn unusual.

"Her Grace has been upset ever since the boutique designer dropped by."

For Jerome, the understanding of his madam's mood was now a more important priority than anything else.

"Was she rude to you?" (Hugo)

Lucia shook her head.

"Then, what is it? Tell me. What is making you so upset?"

“...I think I made a big mess.”

“What mess?”

“Would... Would it be possible to get a refund even now? It may not be finalized yet.”

Hugo, who was ready to immediately get to the root of her problem and eradicate it, instantly softened. Hugo was reminded of the designer that asked him to leave it to her. It would seem the lady had as much ability as her confidence stated.

When Hugo released her chin and began to walk away, Lucia grabbed onto his arm.

“Where are you going? I said I made a big mess! I mean, as many as nineteen outfits were added to the dress!!”

Shoes, hats, and so on, naturally came along with the dresses. The price tag of these additions were not inferior to that of the dress.

Not 190 but 19? Why the ambiguous nineteen instead of cleanly striking at 20? Hugo's rating of Antoine's capability went down. If Antoine were to hear this, she would feel aggrieved. She had used all her means possible to sell those nineteen outfits. Antoine had even justified it with the honor of the Duke that should not be mentioned carelessly.

“I have worked up a sweat all day so I want to wash up first. You can tell me your story afterwards.”

“If you hear the amount, you won't be so calm!”

“If I'm not surprised, what will you give me?”

“...give?”

“A bet has to have a reward.”

“When did I say I was betting!”

“Think about what you'll give me. You have till I bathe and come out.”

Listen when someone is talking! Lucia called after him in protest but he climbed up

the stairs. Oh, for crying out loud. She stamped her feet in frustration for an unknown reason and turned her head to the small sound of someone clearing their throat.

Lucia was embarrassed. The bill Antoine left behind was still circling in her head so she forgot all about keeping up appearances in front of the servants. Fortunately, it seemed the servants had dispersed when she didn't realize it so they didn't see anything.

Lucia looked at Jerome in relief and somehow, his eyes seemed to be smiling.

"Shall I prepare a bath?"

"...Why?"

"You have not bathed yet and since master has already gone ahead, I was just informing you."

Lucia face wend red and she lowered her gaze. She felt embarrassed for some reason. A respectable butler like Jerome would not say that with any intention of the sort. She knew that but the timing was strange.

Lucia stood around indecisively then gave a deep sigh. She would end up bathing anyways. Plus her body was sticky because of the hot weather. However because of a strange feeling of unwillingness, she replied quietly.

"...I'll leave it to you."

"Yes, Milady."

Jerome answered with a smile. Indeed, he was an excellent butler. One that could read the mind of his master.

◊ ◊ ◊

'I must have really lost my senses earlier.'

It was Lucia's first time experiencing the kind of service where one devoted their all with the intention of getting paid. If Lucia had visited the boutique, she would not have let down her guard.

However, she was too relaxed in the safety of her own home. What could a guest do the host? Lucia was thinking too naively. She was used to the flattery of the noblewomen she met at Roam. So she was confident that she would not fall for someone else's nice words.

But now she had to pay the price of looking down on the flattery of a merchant that wanted to sell their product. Antoine's eloquence was weaved to meet the demands of fussy noblewomen and it could capture the human soul.

Antoine was not just a good talker. Her skills were also excellent. She touched the simple dress that Lucia was wearing, here and there, and made it give off a completely different atmosphere.

Lucia had almost forgotten about face and clapped. Antoine first showed off her skill and seduced Lucia's heart. She couldn't understand half of the fashion terminologies that Antoine explained colorfully but she had strangely felt like she understood.

Through Antoine's words, Lucia was reborn into visionary beauty that was the focus of people's eyes. When Lucia thought about it now, it was very ridiculous but at the time, it sounded quite reasonable.

Antoine talked about the rumor that Lucia knew – that the Duchess was a matchless beauty- and while talking, she brought up the honor of the Duke. She also emphasized the fact that the Duke of Taran was so concerned that he visited the boutique personally. After which, she boastfully proclaimed that Lucia should leave everything to her.

[Your Grace only has to relax, count the days till you appear in society and wait for time to pass. I will make the rumor that the Duke of Taran has a beauty of the century as his wife into a reality.]

Lucia inwardly cared about the rumors. It wasn't that she was afraid of people's gazes but that any gossip that concerned him, weighed on her mind.

[Your Grace is beautiful. But like a rough gem, this beauty is not revealed. A rough gem's true beauty is hidden deeply but if not processed properly, it can turn to stone. Please allow me to process Your Grace into a jewel.]

## Part 2

As though bewitched, Lucia signed the contract that Antoine presented her. The things that Antoine says she had to buy were essential and indispensable. At the time, she thought so. Even after Antoine left, she was still somewhat vacant from the feeling of being entranced.

But when she checked the copy of the contract and the invoice delivered in the afternoon, her half departed senses returned. She felt like her soul was about to fly away when she confirmed the amount.

Lucia didn't know that the price to pay for falling for the designer's whispers would be so massive. The price of the first-class designer's dress that she bought for the first time in her life was much more than the vague amount she imagined.

The maid moderately poured lukewarm water on her shoulder. While absentmindedly leaving her body in the hands of the maid waiting on her in the bath, Lucia continued to think of the dress.

'Why in the world are the hats and shoes so expensive? Much less the gloves.'

Lucia's common sense was that hats and shoes were accessories. Nevertheless, a dress was what people saw and while shoes were an assortment, they were not that visible hence Lucia thought that it was enough for them to be presentable. In the dream, she had never even bought something like gloves. And when she bought the dress, she got a few extras.

'On top of that, they're all summer dresses.'

When the weather cooled down a little, she couldn't wear them.

'I have to get a refund. I can't blow that much money on a dress. Anyways, I haven't received anything, and it's custom-made.'

Originally, Lucia wanted to get a refund immediately but Jerome discouraged her. He advised her to discuss it with his master. Asking for a refund after purchase an item was an important issue than concerned reputation. Especially in the case of luxury goods, there was a fear of bad rumors.

While Lucia constantly contemplated a refund, Hugo finished his bath in his bedroom and came into her bedroom. As he listened to the faint sound of the water from the bathroom, he picked up the white envelope on the table.

Contract and Invoice. Hugo sat on the couch and read through the specifications. When he saw the amount, he chuckled. It was about 1/5th of the amount he had written down for Antoine.

Should he recognize the ability of the designer to be able to make her use this much, or should he praise the designer's crook-like merchant talk that thoroughly brought down her defenses, without going overboard?

The designer was determined to use the entire amount that Hugo wrote down. A good merchant would not blow away the chance to make money. However, the designer took a step back.

Hugo did not know because he wasn't at the scene at the time but most likely, the designer must have felt danger that if she were to push excessively, she wouldn't sell a single thing.

Antoine took a step back to move forward. She realized that this business would not be finished in one shot. To Hugo, it was easy to find noble families consumed by the extravagance of their madams. However, he didn't know that he would end up paying attention to this for the exact opposite reason.

She was never stingy to others. When the garden was built back in Roam, the workers on the garden were paid a higher compensation than average. However, Hugo was very tired of her frugality and conservation that only applied to herself. It didn't matter when they were staying in the fiefdom.

Her immaculate skin without her makeup felt good to the touch, and her flowery scent without thick perfume was refreshing. Furthermore, there was no need for extravagant clothes. Clothes existed to be stripped. In that sense, he didn't like winter. The skirt was too thick and heavy.

But originally, he hated the sticky summer. He used to enjoy horse riding in the cold winter. Certainly that was so, until the winter of last year. Hugo had no issue with her attire, but it wasn't the same for others. She had to appear in high society as the Duchess. Appearance was the easiest criteria to judge a person on.

If she were to show a simplicity that was not suitable for her status as the Duchess, she would not be praised for her virtue, instead she would become a target of gossip. He did not want her to become the subject of such a worthless topic.

'I have to meet the designer once more.'

Hugo decided to recognize the ability of the designer. And he wanted to meet the designer again and talk about the contract.

'I have to make two contracts.'

The contract with the real amount would be sent to him and the fake contract with a much smaller amount would be sent to her. He didn't want her to worry about something like money. Even though in her head, she was filled with worries about him, there was no need(1).

---

Translator's Remark:

1. There was no need for her to worry about his money.

# Side-Story 1

## Supplementary story – In Another Future – Philip-

The day was quickly getting darker. Philip looked to the sky to guess the time and estimated the distance to the mountain that was some distance away.

It would be hard to climb the mountain today. Unless it was a state of urgency, it was better to not climb a mountain in the dark.

Philip was a seasoned traveler with lengthy experience but he refused to risk it. He would be sleeping in the streets tonight as well. Once one got accustomed to this lifestyle, making a bed for the night was very swift.

He made a bonfire and had his dinner of dry rations and water. Philip's mind went back to the village he left today. Just like other places, the naive villagers were on guard at first but quickly opened their hearts to him.

It was always sad to shake off the hands holding him back when it was time to leave. Very rarely, there were places that made him consider settling down. However, he was unable to bear it for long and would set out wandering again.

It was a wandering with no destination and no known end. It wasn't for freedom. He was just wandering around aimlessly. Philip reckoned that his family's karma had piled up and become his retribution.

“Hu-hu... my attachment is tenacious.”

The face of the patient from the earlier village suddenly sprang up in his mind. The woman looked old but she had a clear and pleasant expression. Philip didn't think he would see a patient that took mugwort, much less a patient that took it from her first menstruation at a place like that.

He had seen patients whose menstruation stopped for a while after eating mugwort but it was his first time meeting a patient like the one earlier. It was a case where it wasn't done intentionally but it was done of one's own accord. The world was indeed vast, unexpected things happened all the time.

Philip gave the woman the cure. He had torn it out entirely from the notebook passed down as his family's vision. The cure was stored in his head anyways, but there was a reason why he went out of his way to tear it out.

It was a meaningful action to tear off his small attachment that was still persisting and clinging on. In any case, once the Philip that had no family died, these secrets would be buried with him forever. But even then, he was still unable to throw it away but finally, now, he was able to.

“I even asked her if she was a virgin. How stupid.”

Philip ridiculed himself. He wondered why that question had come out of his mouth then. It was no use whether that woman was a virgin or not now.

Tears began to form in his eyes as he vacantly gazed at the bonfire. Due to old age, a pool of tears began to flow from his eyes. Whenever he suddenly recalled the young master, he couldn't bear the sadness and the urge to cry.

Even if he had grown into an excellent young man, to Philip, he was always the little young master. The memories of him holding the toddler's little hand and taking him to the Duke were still vivid in his head. Philip was already content to watch that mature figure from afar.

It had already been several years since the man that was Philip's last hope was buried in the cold ground(1). And since then, the Duke had abandoned the north and only roamed the battlefield(2).

Everything was over. The course was running for the last time.

“Young master Damian...”

Philip's shoulder's shook as he sobbed. Just like the day he held onto the returned corpse of the young master and cried endlessly; Philip stooped to the floor and cried.



PtF by: traitorAIZEN